

勇者様の

II

The Master  
of The Grave

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Yuusha-sama no Oshishou-sama [WN]

*The Master of the Brave*

Arc 2

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[Novel Updates](#)

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# Arc 2

## Chapter 23: Prologue

Locke must have been really exhausted.

Dropping onto his bed after returning to his dorm, he slipped under the covers, and instantly let go of his consciousness.

If Locke had noticed, he would have realized that it was the time Wynn normally woke up.

The sky outside the window was still dark, but the whole sky was filled with stars.

There would also be fine weather today.

Setting his eyes on the neighboring bed, Locke also fell asleep in the very clothes he wore to the banquet.

How many months worth of Wynn's wages did the suit cost?

No, rather, it might be on the scale of years.

The Marine House possessed that much wealth.

Though he was not the successor, he couldn't present himself to the Emperor in shabby clothing.

Did it get creased?

Only having taken off his coat[?1?], Locke lay fast asleep.[?2?]

Wynn let out a small sigh.

Then, his eyes moved down to his own garments, and he frowned.

“... Whoa, I accidentally did it,” he murmured.

He had slept in his school uniform.

It was natural, since he had no recollection of changing his clothes.

He didn’t straighten them out afterwards.[?3?]

First, he took off his clothes and changed to his normal clothes.

Then, he took his practice sword, stepped silently so as to not wake Locke up, opened the door to the room, and stepped into the empty hallway.

After he went outside, he washed his face in the communal fountain.

All of the drowsiness left him when he felt the stinging cold water and the brisk dawn atmosphere.

As he used the towel around his neck to wipe his face, his stiff joints slowly relaxed.

“Okay, let’s go!”

Since there was the banquet yesterday, he wasn’t able to go training.

That’s why he would put even more effort today.

As always, he greeted the sentries who guarded the school entrance through the night.

He ran down the dim and yet empty main street.

His destination was Wandering Bird’s Mistletoe Pavilion.[1]

It was far enough from the knight school to be a good warm-up.

With light steps, Wynn slowly — it would be quite fast to anybody who watched— began running.

Once he filled the barrel at the back of the Wandering Bird's Mistletoe Pavilion to the brim with water, he began washing the vegetables.

Potatoes, carrots, daikons[2], he washed them all thoroughly, while thinking back to the food he ate at the banquet.

Soft, freshly-baked bread.

White fish soup with a rich flavor.[3]

A salad with fresh vegetables and thinly sliced ham.

Tender beef that melted in the mouth.

Magically refrigerated rose water, and freshly squeezed fruit juice.

He would probably never taste it again.

Though he had eaten, just by thinking about it, his mouth watered, and he felt hungry.[4]

After he washed the vegetables while enduring it, he proceeded to deftly wipe the tables and sweep the floor.

At that time, the boss, Randell, and his wife, Hannah, also woke up.

Wynn had permission from them to enter and leave through the back door.

He grabbed the sword leaning against the wall.

He took a deep breath, then exhaled.

He held an image inside his head.

First, he swung the sword once.

He started slowly, then gradually got faster.

During the coup d'état incident, Wynn had killed a person for the first time.[5]

While magic power was sealed, alone against many opponents Aldo, the senior knights, the soldiers, all swung swords, brandished spears, or shot arrows. He could see the trajectories of the weapons.

He could see the trajectories of his opponent's blades during the practice matches, but against more advanced opponents, he couldn't receive the blows, and was blown away many times.

However, while their magic power was mutually sealed, he was able to perceive the attacks, and evade or block them.

'I became strong.'

He felt that for the first time.

Now, he imagined Leticia's blade.

He was able to perceive her intense intimidation and the path of her blade.

Her slashes were faster and more pointed than the knights when he crossed swords with her.

He imagined Leticia's strikes gradually get faster, until he couldn't match her anymore.

"Kuh..."

He somehow avoided the last blow aimed at the head, but it destroyed his stance, and he fell to the ground.[6]

'Strong, huh...'

Leticia was strong, more than he could imagine.

Compared to four years ago, just from the one match they had when they met again, he could tell that she was much stronger.

For one, while he could try to see the path of the blade, there was no time to react to it.

Moreover, when they met again. Leticia hadn't been serious.

At the moment they crossed swords, Wynn knew he would lose.

Unable to brace his legs, he was blown away.

Otherwise, he would have been cut by the blade.

From the stories of those who saw the duel between the Hero Zaunas, and Leticia, the difference in strength was as big the difference between an adult and a child.

He lay on the ground.

The cool ground felt good to his drenched, burning body.

The sky was beginning to brighten, and birds began to chirp as they flew through the air.

Wynn lay face-up on the ground, watching the sky brighten up.

Not only Leticia, but if he also planned to beat other opponents using magic strengthening, he couldn't just kill without crossing swords.

However, at that time, he reached the point that he was able to follow her sword.

Leticia stood at a distant, high place far, far away, but Wynn still felt happy that she had become strong.

“Okay, preparations complete!”[7]

The second son of the Wandering Bird’s Mistletoe, Abel, inspected the parcel that he had bought yesterday, and picked up a brand new one-handed sword.

He slowly drew it from its scabbard, and stared motionlessly at the shimmering blade, which had never been used.

Yesterday, he was invited to an adventurer’s party for the first time.

Though he was hit by his father Randell, he often visited the Adventurer Guild to take simple requests such as collecting wild herbs, chasing away wild animals and monsters which damaged the fields, and other manual labour.

Recognizing his accomplishments, a senior adventurer that he was close with invited him to their party since they had a vacancy.

Their task was to subjugate a bandit group attacking villages near the border.

It was a mission taken in conjunction with other parties.

He couldn’t stop grinning.

“Kukuku.... Fu, fufufu, Ahahahaha!”[8]

He couldn’t hold it back, and ended up laughing out loud.

He felt elated.

Up until then, he had received only menial requests, but this time, he was going to be a member of another party.

Joining a party was a rite of passage for adventurers.

Abel had taken the first step in fulfilling his dream of becoming an adventurer.

He returned the sword to its sheath, and donned brand-new leather armour.

He gagged a bit at the characteristic odor of leather, but held it in.

He was to meet with his comrades exactly at noon.

“Ah, My body is trembling a lot!”

Unable to just stand still, he left his room, and moved to the back of the building.

“Hmm?”

He recognized the boy laying face-up on the ground.

Hey, that's Wynn isn't it!

To Abel, he was more than just an employee of the restaurant.

“Oh? Abel? What is it? You look happy.”

Abel puffed out his chest, as Wynn stayed on the ground, merely turning his head towards him.

“I became an adventurer!”

“Adventurer!? You did?”

“Yeah, that’s right. Today at noon, I will be going with a party to complete a request.”

“Good, so Randell-san let you.”

Wynn raised just his upper body, and thought of Randell, Abel’s father, and the proprietor of the inn.

When he ran away from work, saying “I want to become an adventurer,” Randell’s fist fell onto his head.

Since the older brother Mark was a better successor to the inn, Randell was unable to hide his irritation at the younger brother Abel’s earnest aspiration, but he may have changed his mind.[9]

“The old man[10] has nothing to do with this! I will become an adventurer with my own power!”

“Eh? So Randell-san doesn’t know about it?”

Abel’s expression instantly hardened.

"I am joining the party and becoming an adventurer. I'm not following that old man's orders anymore. Unlike a knight cadet like you, I am now an independent adult."

To Abel, since Wynn was close in age to him, he was an existence that couldn't be ignored.

While Abel played around his brother Mark, Wynn only mutely[11] worked as an employee of the inn.

Mark and Abel ordered Wynn, who lived in a small shed behind the inn, around for the smallest things, treating him like a servant.

That was until a single girl started following him around one day.

Abel was conscious of the girl named Leti, who was prettier than other girls, and his heart leapt at a glimpse of her.

It was love at first sight.

Though they played together, Leti never left Wynn's side and stuck to him.

He got angry at Wynn, and pushed various chores onto him, but even then, Wynn wordlessly, without complaint, did the work.

Soon, Abel realized that Wynn had a different worldview than the others.

He wanted to become a knight.

That the dream that Wynn, who swung his wooden stick, had.

At first, Abel thought that he was foolish.

What was this servant-like commoner orphan saying?

His father Randell more or less understood Wynn's dreams, but his mother Hannah thought that if he had the time and energy to swing a stick around, he

should use it for work.

Even then, Wynn never gave up.

If there is no time for it during work, then he just had to wake up earlier.

He took his time when drawing water, holding buckets in both hands to decrease the number of round trips he had to make.

Abel woke up every morning to see Wynn, finished with drawing water and even peeling the vegetables, wholeheartedly swinging the stick.

Moreover, understanding that he didn't have enough money to pay the enrollment fee for the knight school, and ended up going to the adventurer guild in his free time.

Since adventurers fulfilled requests day and night, the guild was also open all day.

That day, Abel heart that Wynn took a job from the adventurer guild, and secretly took a peek.

He saw a boy younger than him taking up a request with adult adventurers.

Unlike Abel, who was treated like a child, seeing Wynn be treated like a mature grown-up was dazzling.

Until then, Abel had not thought about his future.

His elder brother would succeed the inn.

He would work under a merchant house, and eventually marry and run an independent household.

That was what he thought he would do.

However, Abel admired Wynn, who worked with grown-up adventurers.

'I will become an adventurer.'

He couldn't accept that despite having the status of a servant, Wynn was treated as an equal by adventurers older than himself.

That was why he saw becoming an adventurer as a triumph.

“With the attempted coup, the empire’s knights have a bright future ahead of them, don’t they? Because of that, the knight school is temporarily closed isn’t it? When are you ever going to become a knight?”

“Hmm, when will I become a knight, huh?”

Wynn muttered with an unusually weak tone.

The knight school was closed while knights who sympathised with the principal, Zaunas, awaited punishment.

Many of the instructors were included.

On one side, some were suggesting increasing the limit on the number successful applicants since the number of knights had dropped, while others suggested that commoners should not be promoted as knights since most of the insurgents were commoners.

If they decided to prevent commoners from becoming knights, Wynn’s dream would end there.

Unlike Wynn, who was despondently thinking about how he may not achieve his dream, Abel happily drew his newly bought sword.

“How is it! See it? Behold this sword! Even though it looks like this, it can cut three demonic beasts you know?”

He wore a proud expression on his face.

Wynn was lost in thought, merely gazing at Abel as he swung his sword around.

“That’s right! You have a practice sword right? Let’s have a match!”

Saying this, he suddenly pointed the sword at Wynn.

“Is it fine? What about injuries?”

“It is not a duel.[?4?] Do you not have practice opponents since the school closed down? I’ll practice with you. Let’s go.[?5?]”

“I’m not interested.”

“Wouldn’t it be bad for a grown-up adventurer to go all out and beat a knight cadet student? I’ll make the blows light.”

“If you’re going that far, then...”

Finally, Wynn slowly reached for his sword, and Abel chuckled.

He would beat Wynn with the swordplay of a full-fledged adventurer.

He had decided that he was superior to servants like Wynn.[12]

“Okay, let’s go!”

Though he said that it wasn’t a duel, he had swung the sword, intending to injure him.

However,

“Onii-chan?”

He suddenly heard a dearly missed voice.

It was Abel’s first love, now grown up, and sporting a smile.[13]

Translator notes

1. This is a more correct name for Wataridori Pavilion. I will try to go back and edit Wataridori out later. literally: Migratory Bird’s Mistletoe Pavilion

2. Radish-like. google it... A daikon literally means large root...

3. Some translators add images, but... here’s the raw: 丁寧にダシを取った白身魚の濃厚なスープ。

4. Translating during lunch avoids much envy...

5. Is it coincidence that this “kill” in Japanese is “Kiru”

6. Is this real? is this just fantasy?

7. Abel’s POV

8. I do believe this is a three stage laughter... See Tensei Slime (currently being translated by Guro)

9. kinda Wynn’s POV, this sentence

10. I think sometimes people call their fathers “old man”, maybe use “Pops”?

11. Seems to have connotations of silent in a dumb way...

# Chapter 24: Childhood Friend

“Huh? Leti?”

Wynn lowered the practice sword he was about to use in the duel, and called out to Leti.

“Good morning, Onii-chan.”

“Good morning. Why did you come here so early in the morning?”

“I just happened to wake up now...”

Leticia looked around the backyard of the Wandering Bird’s Mistletoe with faint nostalgia in her eyes.

“In this place, four years ago, I beat Onii-chan for the first time... It has been a long time.[1]”

There was a barrel used to hold water.

Everyday, she would fill that barrel with Wynn, going back and forth between the barrel and the well.

There was a bucket and cart used to dry the laundry, and also bring firewood and charcoal for the stove and fireplace.

Beside it, was a small, shabby shed.

That was where Wynn lived before he entered school.[2]

Overcome by nostalgia, Leticia moved towards the shed.

She could see that that the wooden shed walls had received tremendous damage.

Leticia touched it with her right hand.

As she ran her hand along it, the grime on it crumbled and fell off.

She could see traces of repairs all over the wall.

The young Wynn had made thos repairs himself using scraps of wood.

The storage shed would not have been able to endure the wind and rain if he hadn't repaired it.

However, his repairs did not completely prevent water from leaking through when it rained.

During her younger days, Leticia would often sneak away from home, enter this storage shed, and slip into Wynn's bed.

Though the scraps of wood could not completely block out the cold wind, it was warm under the crude blanket.[3]

Under the thin sheet was a mattress that he borrowed from a stable. That was the makeshift bed Wynn made to avoid the feeling of the cold wooden floor.

It truly was a shabby bed.

However, Leticia felt that it was warmer than the bed in her own room.

There was a soft and warm bed in her room at Duke Mavis's estate.

It should have been better, since it was softer than Wynn's bed.

However, Leticia was treated as a nuisance by her family, and was treated rudely by the servants.

In this storage shed, she could sleep more peacefully than she ever could in that estate.

It gave the lonely Leticia warmth.

There were many times where the movements she made as she slept would wake Wynn up.

Wynn would be troubled, but that delighted face was so loveable—

“Umm...”

Leticia’s face grew hot from thinking about that time, as the boy that was with Wynn addressed her.

“It has been a while, hasn’t it?”

More than Leticia’s flushed face, Abel, blushing vigorously, stood in front of her.

“How many years has it been? I heard you went somewhere far away, but you came back to the capital.”

Leticia tilted her head in confusion.

She glanced at Wynn with a troubled look.

“It’s Abel. He is the youngest son of the innkeeper.”

Upon seeing Leticia becoming troubled from being unable to remember the boy, Wynn sent her a lifeline.

“Ah! Umm, it has been a while...”

“Did you remember me?”

Though his smile cramped up upon the unexpected reality that he was forgotten, Abel tried to maintain his smile.

Meanwhile, Leticia eyed him with caution.

In her memory, the two boys from the Wandering Bird’s Mistletoe were a nuisance to her playtime with Wynn, hiding her books and teasing her to the point of tears.

She instinctively raised her guard.

Abel, delighted that he had reunited with his first love after four years, didn’t notice Leticia’s demeanor.

As a child, she was already an unmatched beauty. After four years, she became comparable to a goddess.[4]

Especially her emerald green eyes.[?1?]

He gazed at Leticia —who was on her guard— and his spirits soared.

“After you left on your journey, I became an adventurer,” said Abel passionately.

“Speaking of, Leti also worked as an adventurer, right? With Wynn.”

“Yes.”

“Will you also do that today?”

“We didn’t plan to today... but we might.”

She looked at Wynn with a questioning expression.

If Wynn was still doing requests as an adventurer, then Leticia would definitely follow.

“Then, this time, won’t you come with me?”

Blind to Leticia’s expression, he once again drew his sword to show her.

The brand-new blade glistened in the sunlight as he raised it.

“Whether it be escorting a merchant, or exterminating bandits, it will be fine. I learned how to use the sword from a senior adventurer at the guild, so it will be fine, even if we’re attacked. It’s not like the fencing they teach in the knight school. It is a swordsmanship tempered by live combat.”

Abel swung the sword as he was taught at the Adventurer’s Guild.

“This will allow me to cut down as many monsters as I can, so you don’t have to worry. I will show you that I can protect you.”[5]

“...Just before, didn’t you say that it could cut down only three monsters?”

Wynn reflexively interjected in a small voice.

Abel looked over at Wynn, who was standing idly behind him.

“Well, I also invited Wynn. Money is important, right? Watch me fight the monsters. When they charge, I’ll just dodge, then slash them. The tension is unbearable!”[?2?]

Ignoring Wynn’s interjection, Abel once again swung his sword with large motions.

This time, he held a shield.

Bewildered by the elated Abel mimicking the movements of defeating a monster, Leticia looked towards Wynn, pleading for help.

On the other hand, Wynn was thinking about what to do.

They were about to have a mock battle, but upon Leticia’s appearance, Wynn was forgotten, and now, Abel was passionately miming a battle against a demonic beast.

There was nothing but bewilderment.

The two people’s perplexed gazes met.

Suddenly, Leticia’s gaze fixed onto one part of his body.

“Onii-chan, is that mud in your hair?”

It must have stuck on while he was laying on the ground.

Leticia stepped towards Wynn, while giving a sidelong glance at Abel, who continued his skit.

“—and then, I slashed like this! My battle form must have been so excellent. I’m in high demand at the adventurer guild. So please, by all means, come with me as I join the par...ty...”

After he finished slaying the imaginary monster, Abel slowly returned his sword to its scabbard.

Then, he triumphantly turned towards Leticia, and— was at a loss for words.

“Onii-chan, let me do it.”

“It’s okay, I can do it.”

“It’s fine. Don’t move.”

Wynn was backing away from the approaching Leticia; however, Leticia stepped even closer as her hands reached for his head.

The brisk wind picked up Leticia’s soft, long hair, tickling Wynn’s right arm.

It smelled somewhat sweet.

Since Leticia was brushing off the dirt on the back of his head from the front, Wynn felt Leticia’s soft bulges on his body.[6]

Leticia either didn’t notice, or didn’t mind it, as she brushed the dirt off his

head.

“Yep, I got it.”

“Th-thanks.”

Wynn scratched his cheek with his right index finger to hide his embarrassment.

Leticia smiled, looking up at Wynn.

Wynn blushed slightly and averted his eyes from Leticia as her smile became illuminated by the rising sun.

“Hey. Wynn.”

Abel came back to his senses after that passionate scene of ignoring him, and bellowed at Wynn.

“You. Me. Duel.”[7]

“Wait a minute, Abel, your eyes are scary!? Didn’t you say it wasn’t a duel before?”

“Shut up! Quiet!” Abel shouted angrily.

Wynn reflexively pulled back.

The current Abel was being overbearing.

Even Leticia, the Brave, reflexively clung to Wynn’s right arm.[8]

“It’s fine, draw your sword! Duel me!”[9]

Ever since she was young, Leti always clung to Wynn.

Even his father, Randell, and the adventurers at the guild, would always support Wynn more.

Even now, he would hear the Guildmaster and the seasoned adventurers say:

—“Has that brat become a knight? Oh, not yet? But if it’s Wynn, he can do anything.”

Even the top-class adventurers didn’t have the slightest doubt that Wynn would become a knight.

Though he was younger than Abel, he worked as an Adventurer, a few years ago.

Doubtlessly, Abel should have been valued more than him by now.

It was frustrating!

The girl he loved, the Adventurers he desired to be like, everyone acknowledged Wynn.

Why was Wynn, who hadn’t become a knight, more acknowledged than he was?

‘Then, I will show her my amazingness by killing a monster.’

“It can’t be helped.”

Wynn gently pushed Leticia's shoulder back.

He slowly grasped the practice sword.

"Here I come, you jerk!"

Abel, shield in hand, leapt at Wynn.

In the end, he rushed towards Wynn, and when he realized it, the tip of Wynn's blade was already pointed at his nose.

Without a doubt, Abel, was thoroughly defeated.[10]

## Chapter 25: Place

AN: I hope the beginning of the second chapter goes well.

"I don't want to die. I don't want to die. I don't want to die."

She murmured softly.

A girl was hugging a sword about her height, crouched on the ground while murmuring.

Tears flowed from her eyes.

She missed that place.

She wanted to go back, but she couldn't return.

'Why am I here?'

'Why do we have to fight?'

'Why...? Why...?'

Her hands, her feet, her whole body wouldn't stop trembling.

Her teeth had been chattering for a while now.

Her heart pounded, as if it were about to burst. Though the weather was typical of a hot summer, she felt an unbearable chill.

The small girl curled up into an even smaller ball, grasping a sword tightly.

She had discovered a small room in the fort.

It must have been a storage room.

Many instruments, which she didn't know how they were used, were haphazardly stored in the room.

In that small storage classroom, she was alone in a corner.

The girl was trembling.

In that place, she could cry without anybody else seeing it.

From the outside, she could hear people's sobs, and men's angry bellows.

A peaceful village was suddenly attacked by a horde of monsters.

Under the command of the Demon Lord, the demons and monsters attacked the defenseless villagers.

Some of the fleeing villagers, unable to resist, had their backs shredded by sharp claws, while others lay on the ground, their lower halves eaten, and their guts spilling out.[1]

Thanks to the soldiers who were sent out from the fort built near the village, some of the villagers managed to flee towards the fort.

However, there were many victims as they fled to the fort.

Many soldiers lost their lives while protecting the villagers.

The commanding knight, in order to buy time for the last villagers to escape, fought furiously, and died in battle.

With large sacrifices, they were able to take shelter in the fort, but the fort was still besieged by monsters.

There were few soldiers left, and none of them were uninjured.

Occasionally, sounds of a large monster ramming its body against the fort's gate.

Without the commanding knight, the soldiers could only grip their weapons, awaiting the moment when the gate would be broken down.

If the monsters were truly serious about destroying the fort, monsters could fly over the gate, or magic-using demons could have broken down the gate.

But for some reason, they were specifically letting a large monster ram against the gate to destroy it.

They were enjoying themselves.

Those who took shelter in the fort, feeling tiny and powerless, were gripped by dread.

Everybody grieved at the fact that their loved ones would be killed.

If the monsters went all-out, the fort, the inhabitants within unable to resist, would be overrun.

At that time, it wasn't unusual for cities, villages, and even forts to fall.

It was a time when the Demon Lord Army brought despair.

A light in those dark times was rare, but there was one at that fort.

It was merely a story.[?1?]

However, each person's sights gathered on the main tower of the fort.

There, was the existence that brought hope to the world.

After having travelled for several days, they had requested a night at an inn, and happened to be there at that time.

It was the one whom the goddess Anastasia designated as the Brave.

Amidst the despair the thought of death to the approaching monsters, her existence brought a slight hope to those people.

That was why, in order to live up to their hopes, the girl was alone in the shed, trapped in a cage.

She couldn't let the others see that she was trembling from the fear of death

like them.

Because she was their hope...

“Leticia?”

Her name was called from outside the room.

“Leticia, they’re almost here.”

“... Ok.”

With a small nod, she wiped her tears with the back of her hands.

She stood up, holding her sword.

The windowless room was not bright, but light slipped through the open door — she realized that her hands were trembling.

“... Wait a moment.”

After replying, she chanted the magic Light with a soft, trembling voice.

As the room brightened, Leticia took many deep breaths.

Her quivering hands were clenched tightly around the sword.

She couldn’t show the shameful appearance of being terrified in front of anybody else.

Because she was the Brave.

A light for the people. Humanity’s last hope against the demon lord’s invasion.

Because she was the Brave, Leticia, van Mavis.

However—

“I wanna go back., help me... Onii-chan”

She murmured with a fleeting voice.

She thought of her childhood friend, who was left behind in the capital.

He, who advanced straight towards his dream.

The only one who brought light to her when she was engulfed in darkness.

Upon thinking of him, the dread washed away from her heart, replaced by a warm, gentle feeling.

Her pounding heart calmed down.

She looked at both of her hands.

Her hands and feet had stopped trembling.

It was now alright.

She opened the door to the storage room and exited it.

Leticia's companion, Tiara Sukiyurusu Belfa stood outside.

“We can't launch an attack before the gate is breached. It's a bad situation.”

Leticia acknowledged Tiara's words with a nod, and started to walk out of the tower.

Her steps reflected none of her previous panic and fear.

“Wait a minute.”

However, Tiara, her beautiful elven face in a slight frown, raised her right

hand to Leticia's face.

"Wh-what?"

"Leticia... were you crying?"

Tiara raised her hand, and Leticia's cheek was bathed in a faint, warm light.

"Healing magic is not my strong point, but you shouldn't stand before everybody with that sort of face."

The light faded.

She healed her eyes, which were swollen from tears.

"Are you alright?"

Leticia turned away from Tiara, who was worried about Leticia's face, and walked towards the outside.

"I'm alright. Since I am the Brave... But, thank you."

She whispered words of gratitude.

With her back straight and her eyes facing forward, she walked out of the tower, no trace of hesitation in her gait.

"That is so.... You are the Brave, Leticia."

She was Leticia.

'Please help us, Leticia-sama.'

All of the survivors, men, women, the elderly, even the fort's soldiers, looked towards Leticia.

Their faces showed their alarm at the inhumane warcry they heard outside, and were dyed with fatigue.

Their despairing gazes all focused on Leticia.

Then, from the despair in their eyes, bloomed a small hope.

The one who held the title of “The Brave” was merely a ten-year-old girl.

But she still wore a beautiful smile on her face.

Upon seeing Mavis the Brave’s warm smile in this hopeless situation, their dread became replaced by a slight hope.

She stood before them, and, with grace unsuited of her age, she drew her sword.

“I will lead the vanguard! Tiara will cover us with magic. Soldiers, shoot at them with arrows! I will advance!”

In the silence, Leticia’s energetic speech caused an uproar.

At her words, vigour returned to their eyes.

Upon confirming this, Leticia started chanting a small spell.

“I bestow my power...”

She cast a body strengthening magic.

It was Leticia’s first battle with lives at stake.

She kicked off the ground and soared into the air.

Her strengthened legs easily carried her light body over the castle ramparts.

She stood atop the gates.

Before her eyes, a large horde of monsters stood on standby.

There were human-shaped devils[2], and demonic beasts.

The sight of the grotesque monsters clamoring instilled a primal fear in people.

However, Leticia looked upon the monsters without changing her expression.

“We’re surrounded, who knows how many monsters there are.”

Unlike Leticia, Tiara had used floating magic to fly above the gate, beside Leticia.

Her long elven ears twitched slightly.

Even she was unable to hide her dread at this amount of monsters.

After them, the soldiers who would fight climbed onto the ramparts.

“What is with these numbers...?”

“There is no way we can win, is there?”

“Not good, I don’t want to die!”

Despair returned to their eyes.

At that moment, Leticia took a deep breath.

“Listen up, you demons!”

Leticia’s call echoed through the air.

At the same time, she released an intimidating presence.

Unable to disregard the aura she projected, both humans and demons looked at her.

Atop the ramparts, a noticeably smaller girl stood out among the weak humans.

However, she gave off such an imposing presence, that unlike the rest, she was an existence which couldn’t be ignored.

“My name is Letica van Mavis. The one who slays demons! Those of you who possess intelligence, if you live to return, report this to the Demon Lord! Know the name of the one who will instill terror in you all! The name of Leticia van Mavis, the Brave!”

The numerous roars that resounded before were now not to be heard.

Both the intelligent devils, and the demonic beasts with nothing other than the impulse to slaughter were taken in by the aura she emitted.

Silence covered the area.

Then, Leticia raised her left hand, which wasn't holding a sword, up into the air, and whispered something.

"I'll turn this glimmer of hope into a big beacon."

At the next moment, swung her hand downwards, and at the same time, a ball of light split into tens of pieces, and rained down on the monsters.

Many intense explosions were heard.

Then, the death cries of the monsters followed.

"I'm going!"

Calling out with vigor, Leticia leapt down from the ramparts.

She ran straight through the dust raised by the explosions.

Appearing from within the dust cloud, she stabbed at a monster with a serpentine body and a wolf-like head.

The monsters once again screamed in agony as they died.

Monster blood flew through the air.

Smelling that, the surrounding monsters all noticed Leticia, and focused their hostilities on her.

With strength beyond humans, strong magic wreaking havoc, and an innate cruelty, their battle instincts overcame her intimidation and attacked her with their fangs.

The quadrupedal demonic beasts had overwhelming mobility and a primitive impulse to slaughter, and one by one, they all attacked Leticia.

Yet, the intelligent humanoid devils, without minding the monsters that should have been their allies, fired magic at the crowd.

It was an overwhelmingly unbalanced battle of one against many.[3]

However, Leticia cut down the charging monsters, her weapon cutting through the monsters like butter.[4]

Unable to dodge the spells, she used the monsters as shields.

Before her eyes, she became drenched in the blood of the monsters.

Incited by the smell of blood, more monsters attacked.

The monsters who were much larger Leticia's small body and the quadrupedal demonic beasts making use of their agility, they all turned into corpses.

Who knew how much time had passed since the beginning of the battle?

In order to avoid hitting her, the soldiers aimed their arrows at monsters far away from her. But now, with their arrows used up, they merely observed the battle with awe.

Even Tiara, who had used powerful magic to bombard the monsters, had already used up her magic power, and was observing Leticia's fight while breathing heavily.

Even after defeating so many of them, the seemingly endless stream of monsters gushed forward.

“Guh...”

Leticia's left arm was grazed by a monster's claw, and bled.

She was extremely exhausted.

Her breathing was uneven.

Though her injured left arm hurt a lot, she didn't say a word.

The claw must have been covered in poison.

She thought that it was lucky that it only paralyzed a part of her body.

“AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHH!!!!!!”

Swinging the sword with her right hand while shouting, Leticia cut down the monster, and searched for another target.

However—

When she came to her senses, there were no more monsters around her.

At some point, the monsters who surrounded her had retreated from the reach of her sword.

When she stepped forward, the monsters in front of her stepped back a step.

The monsters who knew nothing but slaughter, were frightened.

The people gathered on the ramparts looked on, mouths wide open, at the unbelievable scene.

‘Now!’

The tip of Leticia’s sword shone.

As in the beginning of the battle, the sphere of light rapidly expanded.

‘More, more, more power!’

Devoting the rest of her magic power, it expanded to the point that it was larger than her.

The monsters understood it instinctually:

That ball of light contained considerable amounts of magic power.

It rivalled, or maybe exceeded, the power of their Demon Lord.

The monsters in front of the sword slowly backed away— and then scrambled away.

With that as a signal, the monsters besieging the fort also fled.

Then—

“AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!!!!!”

Leticia screamed as she fired the ball of light, which mowed down the monsters in front of her.

The world was bathed in a flash of brilliant light.

There was a deafening roar and a blinding light.

Eventually, as the echoes ceased, and their sight returned, the people saw an unbelievable sight before them.

The ground had been gouged out in a straight line into the horizon.

The top half of a mountain before them had disappeared.

On the path of the line, there were no remains of monsters, their bodies having been completely obliterated.

At the origin of the indentation in the ground stood a girl holding up a sword in her right hand.

Her glistening, beautiful blond hair was darkened by the fluids of the monsters, and her clothes, made of the finest cloths, were likewise stained.

“We won... We survived.”

Everybody whispered.

However, there was no explosion of delight.

Eventually, holding her injured left arm, dragging her feet on the ground, the little girl who held the title of “The Brave” eventually made her way back to the fort.

“That person... is she really... human?”

Somebody whispered.

The voice echoed awkwardly through the silence.

The battle had finished, and Leticia returned triumphantly through the side door.

The looks that were pointed at Leticia were the same those that the Ducal Household and the knights had given her.

‘Is she really human? Is she a demon in disguise? Monster...’

“Leticia, what a terrible-looking face. You should wash it.”

Tiara held out a clean cloth and a bucket of water.

Silently accepting it, she wiped off the dirt from her face.

The water had now become darker, but she continued to wipe her face, hands and feet.

“Thank you very much, Brave-sama. On behalf of all the villagers who survived, I thank you.”

With a quivering voice, an old man thanked her.

He must have been the village chief of one of the attacked villages.

Contrary to his words of gratitude, his whole body was trembling.

Lowering his head, he hurriedly scurried back to the crowd of villagers.

“Brave-sama is a distant existence to us.”

“That person is not far from being a monster.”

Though they thought she couldn't hear their soft voices, Leticia did hear them.

“Nee, Tiara,”

What is it?

“Tomorrow, we'll depart. With me here, they won't calm down.”

“Leticia...”

For her, it was a rare expression to be seen on her face, a sorrowful expression.

Lower than Tiara, Leticia looked down into the bucket of darkened water. She continued disinterestedly speaking words.

“Either way, there are many people in the world who have been attacked by monsters. We should try to defeat the Demon Lord even quicker.”

“Leticia.”

“And also, from now on, could you call me Mavis in front of everybody? Brave Mavis...”

“Leticia!”

Tiara enveloped Leticia in a gentle embrace.

For somebody who could kick around the monsters like it was nothing, she had a slender body.

That body was trembling.

“I— I’m not a mon-monster, right?”

“You aren’t.”

“Leticia is in no way a monster. That’s why we call you Brave Mavis.”

“I got it.”

“I want to go back... I want to see you... Onii-chan”

Embracing Tiara, Leticia cried, as the villagers looked on at a distance.

That was a battle that took place in a village near a fort.

Opposing the demon invasion, humanity had won its first victory, and the battle became the beginning of the legend of Mavis the Brave.

“Here, Onii-chan”

“Ah, thank you.”

Receiving the towel, Wynn wiped off his sweat while looking at Leticia.

Just like four years ago, before she left for her journey, Leticia stood beside Wynn.

With just that, her face softened.

It was a familiar place.

She drew water from the barrel with a bucket and washed the towel.

After wringing it out slightly, she once again delivered it to him.

“The coolness feels good. Thanks, Leti.”

“You’re welcome.”

She smiled pleasantly.

They had reunited at the school.

Wynn now went in and out of the room in his dorm.

In the courtyard in front of the dorm, she had attacked him with a surprise attack to show off her current strength.

However—

She had returned to that place, the small yard behind the Wandering Bird's Mistletoe.

“What is it, Leti?”

She realized that tears had started flowing from her eyes.

They streamed down her cheeks, and fell off her chin.

“Did something happen? If there’s a problem, we can talk it out?”

“No, it’s nothing.”

She rubbed her eyes.

Again her eyes were swollen.

But today, it was not needed to conceal it with healing magic.

“I felt so lucky, so happy, that tears that flowed out.”

“So it was like that?”

“Yes. But first, I’m home.[5]”

Saying that, she smiled at Wynn.

“Umm, I don’t quite get it, but ... Welcome home? Leti...”

Leticia gently reached out to Wynn.

In four years, she was unable to touch the one she loved at all.

That was an unbelievable burden.

“What is it, Leti?”

Curiously, Wynn’s face reddened at the fact that Leticia was unusually close.

Leticia was snuggling up to him, acting spoiled, but then—

“Oh, sorry.”

She sensed that Locke and Cornelia were standing there, motionlessly watching her.

The two had frozen with awkward expressions, as their friend scratched his head.

# Chapter 26: Tranquility

“Damn it...”

He didn’t win.

He had handled requests, alone, until he became an adventurer.

The requests included collecting herbs in a certain part of the forest, or chasing away animals from villages in the capital city’s hinterland at night. These requests were merely odd jobs for beginners, but he continued to work at them until he was trusted by the Guild.

He persuaded a senior adventurer to teach him how to use weapons.

He was confident.

He had even been invited to a party.

He had planned to surpass Wynn, who had yet to become a knight.

However, he learned from that duel that he couldn’t do a thing.

On the contrary, he lost in front of his crush, after meeting her again after four years.

By the time he swung his sword, Wynn’s sword was already pointed at his face.

Unable to stand the sight of Leti, who was smiling brightly, so close to Wynn, without saying a word, Abel ran to his room, grabbed his stuff, and dashed out again.

He wanted to leave as fast as he could.

It was not yet the meeting time, but he ran straight for the Adventurer’s

Guild.

It was his dream to be part of an adventurer's party.

As he waited to meet his fellow party members at the Guild, he tried not to think about his match with Wynn.

He tried, but...

Though it was his dream, Abel sighed as he trudged towards the end of the line in the adventurer's party.

"What's wrong, Abel?"

"... Riggs-san."

Lost in thought, he hadn't realized that he ended up beside a man with a gigantic stature.

It was Riggs the axe-wielder.

He was the leader of the party who invited Abel.

He was a veteran adventurer acknowledged by the capital's Adventurer's Guild. He was the one who managed the parties that were being assembled to for the current mission to subjugate a bandit group.

"You have such a gloomy face, even before the mission. Were you ignored by a woman?"

“Ugh...”

Being right on the mark, the words hit Abel like a brick.

“Wahaha! I was right on the mark. Who is the other girl?”

“It’s somebody Riggs-san also knows.”

“Hou? If it’s a girl I know... Is it the Flowering Moon Inn’s Mira? The Roadside Pebble Inn’s Merril? Or is it Connie?” [1]

Amongst the smiling adventurers, Riggs listed the popular shop girls one by one.

“...It’s Leti.”

With a peeved expression, Abel interjected with a whisper.

“Leti? The Leti that’s always stuck to Wynn?”

“Oh? That Leti-san.”

Upon hearing Wynn’s name, Abel frowned.

Riggs stopped laughing, then looked seriously at Abel.

“If it’s Leti, that’s impossible.”

“Ah, it really is impossible.”

“That’s why...”

Overhearing his conversation with Riggs, the other party members said that it was impossible, to Abel’s indignation.

“What are you guys saying!?”

Upon seeing their uniform faces of pity, Abel became incensed.

“It’s just that, that girl is...”

Leti— Leticia van Mavis.

The adventurers were able to find this out with their intelligence network.

The adventurers affiliated with the capital’s Adventurer’s Guild were in contact with their junior adventurers.

Mingling among the adults, Wynn and Leticia would come in and out of the Adventurer’s Guild, completing odd jobs and errands as a pair.

At first, thinking that it was a childish exploration, they were made light of, but upon seeing them cross swords at the Guild’s training facilities, they were slowly acknowledged.

After showing swordsmanship uncharacteristic of children, the novice adventurers who hadn’t learned the skills tried to leave the training center faster.

Eventually, they didn’t see Leticia anymore, and Wynn had saved up the money for the admission fee for the knight school and was admitted, their visits decreased. But the pair left such a strong impression that they weren’t

forgotten.

Later, when Leticia's many achievements as the Brave reached them through rumors, those who knew her during her younger years realized the difference in their abilities.

"Well, we should stop talking about difficult matters. She's out of reach."

"I didn't know that!"

"Either way, doesn't Leti-chan like Wynn?"[2]

"Uuh..."

Abel frowned, unable to reply.

Leticia had always followed Wynn around since they were young.

Through observing the couple's duels, they could see that Leticia held feelings for Wynn.

It was a fact that Abel didn't want to accept...

Even if Riggs hadn't met Leticia since she returned victoriously as the Brave, from Abel's behavior, it was easy to tell that Leticia strongly yearned for Wynn.

In the first place, they were of different social statuses.

Apart from being the Brave, she was also a Duke's daughter, giving her a position among nobility, second only to royalty.

Even if Wynn had her heart, it would be reckless for an unrelated person like him to obtain her hand.

“Even then, I won’t give up! I’ll raise my fame, and then, I’ll confess to her!”

Abel raised his fist as he proclaimed.

After the mission, Riggs, wearing a wry smile beside Abel, planned to tell Abel about the value of information gathering.

‘Concentrate, focus on the opponent’s movements.’

To Locke, who was clad in light leather armour, the most important goal was to stop the agile Wynn’s movements.

With his strength magically enhanced, if he could stop Wynn’s movements, then he could win.

Holding his wooden shield in front of him, he observed Wynn’s movements.

It was an opponent he had faced countless times.

In order to tempt Wynn into attacking, he slowly closed in on him.

When the shield blocked the very first attack, he would thrust out just as Wynn stopped moving.

Wynn’s stance dropped slightly—

Bam![3]

With his step creating an intense sound, he instantly moved towards Locke.

Quickly and pointedly, he aimed below Locke’s shield, his abdomen.

Gak!

The sword collided with the face of the shield.

“URAAAAAAH!!!”

Locke stopped Wynn’s blade with his shield, and thrust at Wynn’s throat with a shout.

Wynn took a hanmi pose and then leapt to the side.[4]

Then, Locke, once again, held his shield up, as Wynn raised his sword, gauging the distance between them.

“Ooh, Locke-san, that was pretty strong.”

Leticia, who was observing their spar from the sidelines, commented.

“Ah, that’s because Locke was the runner-up in last year’s Knight Selection Tournament.”

“Oh? I didn’t know that.”

Noting the words of Cornelia, who sat next to her, Leticia inspected the frivolous-looking red-haired youth who was sparring with Wynn.

It was about a month after Leticia returned to the Wandering Bird’s Pavilion after four years, and the day Wynn dueled Abel.

Since the Knight School was still closed, Wynn and Locke would occasionally train together.

Since Locke also had responsibilities as an apprentice knight, it wasn’t every day.

Due to the coup d'état, there was a shortage of full-fledged knights

Consequently, the duties of the apprentice knights increased.

It was the same for Cornelia.

After the incident, she also started joining in the training.

Since she was a princess, she couldn't just exit the castle as she pleased.

She also had official duties.

She came here with an escort, which was now on standby off to the side.

On the other hand, Leticia visited Wynn every day, like before.

She was a noble of the highest position in the country, but as the Brave, she could avoid being involved in the country's matters.[5]

Because of that, Leticia, who had not much else to do, borrowed books from the library to read with Wynn, and the sight of the pair studying became common.

That's why, even if Leticia was almost always with Wynn, it was rare for the four of them to be together.

In the past month, though Wynn and Locke were timid upon learning that she was the princess at first, they eventually opened up to Cornelia. It was to the point that her Imperial Knight escorts wore sullen expressions, but since they were also in the presence of Leticia, they didn't voice their opinions.

On this rare occasion in which the four of them were present, Leticia and Cornelia sat under the shade of a tree while watching Wynn and Locke train.

Unable to keep up with Wynn's almost superhuman speed, Locke always faced Wynn, observing his movements, creeping forward, defending himself with a shield, and then counterattacking with one strike.

"It's amazing, isn't it? Since I'm observing from the sidelines, I can see Wynn's blade, but when I'm up close, I can't see it at all."

Cornelia was praising the fact that though their magic was sealed, Wynn, and Locke, who fought with Wynn, overwhelmed many knights and soldiers.

His strategy should have been a bad choice against the agile Wynn.

Thus, Locke's abilities were excellent for an apprentice knight.

If he weren't from a wealthy family, but rather an aristocratic family, he may have claimed the top spot from Regin, who lost his life during the coup.

However—

“But, Onii-chan still isn't giving it his all.”

“Eh?”

Just as Cornelia heard Leticia's remark—

“ooOOOOOH!!!”[6]

Wynn raised his voice.

He closed the distance between them, and attacked with a horizontal slash to the neck.

As with the first thrusting attack, Locke used his shield to receive the blow.

The sound of the sword and shield colliding was heard once again.

“Wha-!?”

Locke, who tried to counterattack with a thrust like the first time, raised his voice.

At the moment Locke was confused by the fact that Wynn was no longer at the place he was aiming at, Wynn's blade was held to Locke's throat.

“You used the recoil from the collision to attack from the other side, huh...”

It was fast.

Even Cornelia, who was watching from the sidelines, was unable to perceive Wynn’s movements, but Locke was able to keep Wynn in his field of vision.

“You really are strong, to be able to move like that even without magic.”

Wynn retracted his sword as Locke took a deep breath, and smiled bitterly at his friend.

“But Locke, weren’t you able to follow my movements? The knights from before weren’t even at the point of struggling to do it.”

“That was an one-on-one fight. If I fought you on a battlefield, I would be slaughtered along with all my allies.”

“What do you wanna do? One more round?”

“Nah, it’s fine.”

“Wait a minute!”

Leticia also obtained a practice sword and shield like Locke and Wynn.

“Onii-chan, may I join? Seeing the two of you, I also can’t resist joining in!”

“Ah, then I’m dropping out okay?”[7]

Locke set his shield down.

“No. It’s two-versus-one. It’s fine if you go all out, since I’m going to be using magic.”

“”Eh!?”

Leticia stretched her body.

“Hey, didn’t Leticia just see my fighting style?”

Leticia, who treated Wynn as her Master, had the same speed-based fighting style.

However, she had a god-like magical power to strengthen her body.

“The shield would be torn to shreds— no, even the blade would be smashed, and my body would be blown away, wouldn’t it?”

“That’s right... Well, you get to spar with Mavis the Brave. What an honour!”

“Well, let’s go all out!”

Leticia looked over her shoulder with a smile.

She gradually became wrapped in magic power, and a golden glow was visible, even in the sunlight.

Wynn and Locke exchanged glances.

“It seems like she really is going to fight seriously.”

“Wha-what is that light?”

“Well, try not to die!”

In the end: two people were left full of holes, only hanging on with Cornelia’s healing magic.

AN: I plan get things moving next time.

# Chapter 27: Tranquility and Shadows

In the mountains near the borders of the Remulshil Empire.

They were marching along a narrow trail that branched off from the highway.

They reached a clearing where the trees had been felled by human hands.

It was a plaza overrun with grass, but there once were many buildings built here.

However, in the settlement, neither fields, tools, nor livestock were seen.

Though it was a village, there were no children or elderly people.

There were only traces of people having lived there.

The houses were simple enough to be merely called cabins.

It was the base of a bandit group which was robbing travellers, merchants and surrounding villages.

People who weren't able to live normally, those became ruined by debt, even soldiers who had deserted from the army, all sorts of people gathered there, committing misdeeds in the village..

They raided the defenseless villages nearby, and robbed the caravans passing through on the highway.

Acquiring provisions like that, while living hedonistically without thinking of tomorrow, it was a collection of those sorts of wild men.

But now, those men of the bandit group had taken up arms, and scattered among the simple huts.

Standing around the huts, the men's eyes glistened, not missing even the slightest abnormality.

They wore uniform armour, gripping the swords hung around their waist.

Somebody who appeared to be the commander, wearing better armour than the rest, was giving out instructions. From his disciplined movements, it was

clear that he was a trained soldier.

Five men were within one of the huts, the one that seemed bigger than the rest.

One of the men was tied to a chair, surrounded a middle-aged man and three knights, who appeared to be guarding him.

“Shit... ya bastards. I’ll never forgive ya.”

Though the man was tied up, he glared at the men surrounding him.

He was the leader of the bandit group.

As expected of somebody who had gathered 50 people into the bandit group, even when he was tied up, he wasn’t trembling like a weak-willed person, but rather still intended to fight his way out.[?1?]

However, the knights did not move an inch.[?2?]

The middle aged man’s face also didn’t change, simply looking down at the bandit leader.

“Hmmm, for you to not beg for your life even in this situation, you have some courage. However, don’t forget that if we felt like it, we could slaughter you and your cute underlings easily.”

“Damn!”

The leader’s face contorted as he glared at the middle-aged man.

It was true.

If they decided to attack, they could slaughter everybody.

Despite this, these people left those of the bandit group alive.

They must have seen some use in the bandit group.

That’s why, instead of killing them, they were merely incapacitated.

Even they were aware that they weren’t working honestly.

That’s why they were always vigilant.

Nevertheless, they were ambushed, and subdued without a being able to resist.

Even if they had fought back, their opponents were more skillful, so it was better to obediently give in.

With these mental calculations, the leader swallowed his anger, and opened his mouth.

“... Now, what will you do with us?”

“Hou, for a bandit group, your head is screwed on tightly. Getting straight to the point, we want you to become our pawns.”

“...In this situation, I have no choice but to concede. Who should we attack? Do ya wanna kill some nobles or merchants? Or do you want us to kidnap somebody?”

“A wise choice.”

The middle-aged man nodded, and gave the leader several names and places. The leader heard this, wide-eyed and his mouth opened.

“Hey, are you serious? This is excessive. You, are you planning to start a war?”

“Well, something like that.”

“So, we’re collateral?”

“This way of life as collateral? On that matter, the reward will allow you all to leave your lifestyle.”

“... It’s fine. We’ll do it. It’s fine if we do it our own way, right?”

“Of course. Rather, that will be convenient for us. Moreover, we also have other collaborators, and welcome more people to your business.”

“... I see.”

Those were wise words.

The leader thought about it.

He would be able to gain more subordinates, and expand the bandit group.

And so, the armies raised by the feudal lords in the vicinity, and the soldiers and adventurers hired by the villages came to subjugate them.

If they were in it for quick riches, then they would have changed jobs.

But they would have considerable power, being backed by this middle-aged man.

In these delicate circumstances, it wasn’t a bad gamble.

“First, untie these ropes. You gonna put your words into actions, right?”

The middle-aged man assented, and ordered that the rope behind the leader’s back be untied.

“Huh? Huuh? When did you come back?”

“It has been a long time, Oba-san[1] I returned just last spring.”

“I see. You were really cute as a kid, I’m really surprised that you grew up to become so beautiful.”

“Ahaha, you’re flattering me.[2]”

“Speaking of returns, Brave-sama also returned last spring. Brave-sama was also pretty, but I’m sure she’s no match for Leti-chan’s beauty.”

Not even in her wildest dreams did she imagine that Brave-sama and Leti were the same person.

After they finished working at the Wandering Bird’s Mistletoe, Wynn and Leticia walked around the capital.[?3?]

They were headed to the palace in the middle of the capital.

Cornelia had invited them to tea.

Since the school was still closed, they had nothing else to do in the afternoons, so the two were delighted to accept the invitation.

Locke also planned to join them after he finished all of his apprentice knight work.

As they walked towards the capital, they met the old lady from the apothecary whom they had helped as they acted as adventurers

“I heard that you went somewhere far away, but will you leave again?”

“I won’t I don’t plan to right now. Of course, I can’t say that it won’t happen...”

Leticia peeked at Wynn for a moment, then smiled.

'Leticia's in a really good mood today...'

Leticia was having a conversation with the lady from apothecary while laughing.

He was fascinated by her smiling face.[3]

Locke and Cornelia were actually Leticia's closest friends, excluding Wynn.

Even when she walked with Wynn and the other two, she had a reason to be in a good mood, but for her, who was often alone as a kid, she wanted to make new friends.

As for Wynn, he enjoyed the rare opportunity to visit somebody he considered a friend.

However, though he thought of her as a friend, she was a princess, and though he looked forward to visiting her, he was anxious about going to the castle.

They didn't notice, but the people on the street all turned their heads to look at her.

Leticia was extraordinarily beautiful.

Though they were in an inexpensive style, her clothes were clearly made of a luxurious material.

It was natural that she attracted everybody's attention.

Upon noticing Wynn's gaze, Leticia bid the auntie farewell, and jogged up to him.

“Sorry, I made you wait, Onii-chan— Huh? What’s wrong?”

“A, ah. No, it’s nothing.”

Feeling that something was amiss, Leticia tilted her head.

Wynn averted his eyes to hide his embarrassment, bowed to the old lady, and started walking.

Leticia walked beside him.

“I got some sweets.”

Leticia chewed on one of the candies in a bag.

“Here, Onii-chan.”

Wynn took a candy from the bag she held out, and put it in his mouth.

He tasted the sweetness of the sugar in his mouth.

“It’s yummy.”

Leticia looked up at Wynn with a smile.[4]

“Onii-chan?”

“Ah, yes.”

To hide the fact that he was fascinated by her smiling face, Wynn threw another candy into his mouth.

“Speaking of, Leti often brought sweets when we were young, didn’t you?”

Sugary sweets were expensive, so normal people rarely ate them.

When they were young, Leticia sometimes brought sweets with her when she snuck out, eating them together with him.

When he met with Leticia, Wynn, who had never tasted the sweetness of fruits, enjoyed the sweets she brought, but he also enjoyed these sorts of candies.

“Yes, we sure ate a lot after studying.”

They would secretly eat the sweets in Wynn’s hut, or by the riverside while listening to the flowing water, where Mark and Abel from the Wandering Bird’s Mistletoe couldn’t steal them.

“I really enjoyed the sweets that Leti brought back then.”

“It couldn’t be, were you playing with me because of the sweets?”

“Ahaha... No way...”

Wynn averted his eyes.

It was true that he was partly enticed by the sweets.

“Good grief. A cute girl comes to see you everyday, you were so blessed!!”

“No, no, no, I was happy to be together with Leti. But the sweets were hard to resist.”

“Sheesh!”

Leticia, slightly annoyed, lightly pinched Wynn’s arm.

“But I may have enjoyed eating sweets with Onii-chan back then.”

Unlike Wynn, Leticia was never troubled by food.

Though she was neglected by her family and her surroundings, as a noble daughter, she was could get as many sweets as she wanted.

For that matter, she could also get as much money as she wanted.

However, rather than eat sweets alone, or read stories alone, it was much more enjoyable to eat sweets, or read stories with her beloved Onii-chan,

“Even now, I feel more happy eating these sweets than any sort of banquet or feast.”

“Leti...”

Leticia discretely got closer to Wynn.

Her soft hair tickled Wynn’s face, and her fragrance enveloped Wynn.

He gently caressed Leticia’s head.

It was unthinkable that such a slender, soft body had slain the Demon Lord.

“After the journey, it has become calmer.” [?4?]

“Is that so...”

It would be great if that moment lasted forever.

Their bodies close together, Leticia smiled softly as she looked up at the slightly red-face Wynn.

1.Granny/Auntie... older woman

# Chapter 28: Nobles and Commoners ①

“Hey, Wynn!”

Locke, who had finished his work as a knight (errands normally for full-fledged knights), called out to Wynn when he spotted him standing on the red carpet in the hallway with nothing to do.

Wynn turned around and waved upon hearing his voice.

Upon recognizing Locke, relief showed on his face.

“So you finished your work?”

“Ah, huh? Leticia-sama isn’t with you?”

“Cornelia-sama’s maid came, and just dragged her off. There should be another guide that will come but...”

“Then you should wait a bit. Around here, there are places where lower classes aren’t allowed to enter.”

“Of course. It’s my first time in a palace like this, I can’t calm down.”

Wynn uneasily looked around him.

When Leticia was with him, he didn’t feel as helpless as when he waited

alone.

It was inevitable that the palace knights that stood guard here and there gave him looks of rejection.

Wouldn't anybody apprehend a suspicious person?

That thought crossed his mind.

In reality, they knew that Wynn was the Master of the Brave, and were merely observing him, now that the rumored person was before them.

"However, it's just like you to come to the palace in your knight school uniform, when the princess invites you for tea."

"I just don't have any other clothes. If I had them, I would have also worn them to that banquet. This is the most formal set of clothes I have."

"If that's the case, then why don't you borrow some?"

"If I wore it, I wouldn't suit the clothes. Are you wearing the uniform of a full-fledged knight?"

"That's right. But since I am an apprentice knight, I don't have the insignia. As an apprentice knight, I'm in charge of the miscellaneous errands."

"That's so cool... I'm jealous..."

'Is he an idiot?'

Locke was truly amazed at his friend.

‘The things that are truly cool aren’t these superficial garments, but the fact that a commoner without any political influence like you was invited to the castle.’

Not even the highest ranked nobles get invited, much less other nobles.

‘You dense fool! Notice it!’

It was Locke who was jealous of Wynn, who was looking at his garments.

Locke smiled wryly at the fact that his friend hadn’t grasped the true amazingness of the situation.

“I wasn’t minding the stares of the palace knights, but...”

“If they really thought you were a suspicious person, we would have been apprehended by now. Don’t mind it.”

“Palace knights, huh...”

Wynn looked at the palace knights standing close to him.

“I admire them. Though it may be impossible to be an Imperial Knight, I want to be part of the palace knights.”

“Well, it will be fine. Maybe you will become one. Rather than that, you might end up working your way up to the Imperial Guards.”

“Is that so?”

“With the support of the princess and a duke’s daughter, you could almost do anything.”

The Crown would want to tie Leticia the Brave to the country.

Rather, it would be convenient if Wynn was close by.

Up until now, it was difficult to get Leticia to leave Wynn’s side.

The problem was, there might have been nobles who didn’t find this arrangement amusing.

“So the rumour that they would start accepting commoner knights is true?”

“I don’t think that it’s because they’re shorthanded. However, it is still hard to be assigned to either the Royal Knight Order, or the Imperial Knights.”

“Just now, didn’t you say that if it were me, I could even become an Imperial Knight?”

“Wynn is special. Don’t you remember that you’re the Master of the Brave?”

“Really? Even then, I would probably be a clerk or something...”

“Excuse me. Please excuse me for being late. Locke Marine-sama, Wynn Byrd-sama.”

They heard a female voice carrying a hint of mischief, mostly likely the maid.

“I have been asked by Her Highness the Princess to guide you. This way, please.”

The two exchanged glances, then followed behind the maid.

The palace was a place completely distant to a commoner.

Unlike the people who only temporarily worked there, everybody was of a higher status than the two of them.

Still, Locke was used to interacting with eminent nobles in high society, but to Wynn, who had no experience[1] he felt that this environment was suffocating..

In this solemn mood, the two silently followed the maid.

After they had been walking around the enormous palace for a while, they heard the sounds of several people laughing and chatting.

They must have been nobles.

They weren't wearing the clothes of servants.

The youthful nobles wore dazzlingly gorgeous clothes.

The maid stepped to the side of hallway.

Wynn and Locke likewise stepped aside.

Rather than passing by them as one would expect, one of the nobles stopped in front of the three of them.

“Hey, I haven't seen those faces before. Miss Maid, who are these guys? New servants?”

“No, they are Princess Cornelia-sama's guests, Locke Marine-sama and Wynn Byrd-sama.”

“Aren't they commoners?”

Upon hearing their names, the young noble frowned.

“Commoners? Why is Her Highness the Princess inviting commoners?”

Hearing the young noble’s voice, the other nobles also cut in.

Locke clicked his tongue silently.

‘What a hassle it has become.’

“Wait a minute. isn’t the Marine house a merchant house?”

There was a guy who knew him.

Locked stepped forward, bowing deeply.

“Yes. I am the second son of the Marine House, Locke. Thank you for your patronage.”

“Oh, your esteemed father even helps here.”

The twenty-something year old noble, whose body was as fat as a toad and whose head was as barren as a desert, held out his hand, having been a business partner of the Marine house.

“Count Elstead, it is good to see you.”

‘Yuck, his hands are sweaty... Gross...’

Even while thinking negative thoughts, Locke merely displayed an artificial smile, cultivated since he was young, and returned the handshake.

He truly was a merchant to the core.

Even though he was not going to succeed the family business, he was still trained in the craft.

“This is the son of the Marine family, Locke-dono. His father has helped our House out many times.”

“Although I may be inexperienced, I am pleased to make your acquaintance.”

Locke put his hand to his chest, while bowing his head according to etiquette.

In response, the nobles haughtily nodded.

It appeared that Count Elstead, the fat, bald toad, had the highest status of all those young nobles.

His companions were either Viscounts or Barons, or they held status equivalent to a baron, due to not being heirs.

According to Locke’s vague memory, Count Elstead had a high ranking within the court, but was not affiliated with any of the major factions.

His pride was the resplendent estate in his territory.

Rumour had it that he enjoyed hosting banquets and feasts at his prided estate.

There was gossip about how his vices left him destitute, so he could only wear the same set of luxurious clothes.

Believing themselves to be the center of the world [2], they scorned those

below them, and despised the weak.

Expectedly, one of them turned to Wynn.

“Hey, and you? Tell me your name.”

“I am a Knight School student called Wynn Byrd.”

Trying to copy Locke, he bowed his head awkwardly.

“What? A commoner, huh.”

Elstead clicked his tongue and frowned.

He was unable to accept the fact that commoners could become knights.

He held a lot of pride in his social class.

Locke looked coldly at Elstead.

Raised in a merchant family, he appraised Elstead and his lackey nobles.

Since they mistakenly conflated one’s status at birth, as a commoner or noble, with one’s ability, continued transactions with him were profitable.

Locke only needed to say a word to his father, and these transactions would cease.

Even though they were merely a merchant house, the Marine House had that much power.

As somebody who wasn’t going to be the successor of the Marine House, he wanted to avoid dealing with disadvantageous people, for his employment

prospects.

“For a commoner to become a knight cadet... what a sad world this has become. You know that this is the palace, right? This isn’t a place for commoners, nor knight cadets. Scram.”

“Please, wait a minute, Count Elstead. These people are the honoured friends of Her Highness the Princess, whom she had invited.”

“The Princess?”

The nobles all frowned when they heard the maid respond for Wynn.

“What is Her Highness thinking? One must invite people of a well-established lineage to the palace. What will she do if something happens?”

“It is because Her Highness has spent so much time outside. If her tutor wasn’t always beside her, I would be worried.”

“Hey, you, Wynn or whatever you’re called.”

Acting as their representative, Count Elstead stood in front of Wynn.

“Even though you were invited by the Princess, and could visit the castle despite being a commoner, don’t let it get to your head. Couldn’t you have found some reason to refuse?”

‘Hey, hey, wouldn’t it be impolite for a commoner to reject the princess’s invitation?’

While maintaining his false smile, Locke mentally threw in a tsukkomi[3].

“But, since it’s an invitation from Her Highness the Princess, wouldn’t it be impolite?”

Wynn replied in the same manner as Locke’s retort.

However, Elstead still couldn’t accept it.

His face reddened.

“Just see what happens if you’re this careless to royalty. You would be punished for *lèse majesté*[4], you bastard—”

He pointed at the dagger hanging at Wynn’s waist,

“The only ones allowed to bring a weapon into the palace are aristocrats and the Imperial Guards! You should at least know this much!”

“No, this is...”

“That dagger is no problem, since we have examined it, and Her Highness has already given her permission.”

“That’s not the point! Maids should shut up!”[5]

“What would we do, if something happens because we let some unknown guy bring a weapon with him?”

“Perhaps, this maid is also...”

“Wouldn’t it be better to let the Imperial Guards know?”

The nobles forcefully grabbed the maid, who had defended Wynn.

People started to notice the uproar that was occurring.

Some of the Imperial Guards had also noticed the commotion, and were making their way towards them.

It really turned out to be a bother.

Locke mentally clicked his tongue.

‘If it escalates, then Cornelia-sama and Leticia-sama should be called.’

Just as Locke thought to ask somebody to call those two there—

“What is this commotion?”

There stood Leticia, one of the people Locke was about to summon, and on her face, there was a smile that held a hint of anger.

1.I decided against translating it literally to XP points... It's not one of the isekai game cheat novels...

2.It's true, as long as the frame of reference is set correctly...

3.For the uninitiated: Tsukkomi≈retort. Google manzai, or boke and tsukkomi

4.the insulting of a monarch or other ruler; treason

# Chapter 29: Nobles and Commoners ②

“What is this commotion?”

Leticia spoke in a clear voice.

The surroundings fell silent.

Wearing a light blue dress that gave off a tidy impression, Leticia’s slender body slowly made its way towards Wynn’s group.

Unlike the gaudy dress she wore at the banquet, since she was having tea with close friends, her dress was embroidered with simple silver thread. The way it glistened and sparkled matched her blonde hair well.

The dress she wore as a noble lady was dazzling, but since the decorations were minimal, Leticia’s natural beauty stood out.

In addition to that, the castle evoked a solemn atmosphere, as if she were a goddess who had descended onto the earth.

The nobles, and others who had noticed the commotion, all had their gazes drawn towards Leticia.

Even those who should have been accustomed to the pretty noble lady unconsciously drew their breaths.

Even Locke and Wynn, who met the normal Leticia at the knight school and at the Wandering Bird’s Roost, forgot about the nobles surrounding them, and stared at her.

As if time had stopped, the area fell silent.

Everybody watched as the breathtaking Leticia slowly walked to Wynn's side.

"Leti?"

Leticia grabbed Wynn's left arm.

Leticia smiled at Wynn's puzzled voice.

However, the smile disappeared as Leticia's jewel-like emerald green eyes looked back at Elstead with cold anger.

—"By Her Highness, Cornelia's orders, I'm honored to bring Leticia-sama in first."

When they arrived at the castle and met Cornelia's maid, Leticia was invited in first.

Although she was worried about leaving Wynn, who was unused to that sort of place, alone, Cornelia believed in her newest friend. If he was with Leticia, he wouldn't be apprehended as a suspicious person.

The ten maids who had guided her before, now approached her with a gorgeous dress.

Cornelia prepared that dress, while taking into account the fact that Leticia liked clothes that are easy to move in.

Actually, as a noble lady with the status of a Duke's daughter, she wasn't lacking in dresses.

Just like when she was young, after her odyssey as the Brave, she rarely wore a dress.

Of course, they could be tailored to her as she wished.

If she ordered one of the Duke's tailors, they would tailor it for her.

However, Leticia herself didn't like to dress up elaborately, so for a Duke's

daughter, her wardrobe was almost empty.

“I understand that Leticia-san prefers this sort of attire, but a feminine appearance will make Wynn-kun’s heart skip a beat.”

Cornelia spoke with a mischievous smile, and Leticia couldn’t help but agree.

She was distracted by the words “skip a beat.”

She was quickly surrounded by maids, and her clothes were changed in the blink of an eye.

“Well, you look beautiful!”

The maids, who were obviously used to such things, rapidly changed Leticia’s clothes, then raised their voices in praise.

“Do I really look beautiful?”

Even Cornelia agreed with a smile, although the Leticia who didn’t normally fuss about her clothes wasn’t bad.

“I shall go meet him now.”

‘Maybe Onii-chan will say that I’m cute?’

She soon arrived to where Wynn was, wanting to show her dressed-up appearance to him as soon as possible.

Her heart pounding, she spotted Wynn—

And Leticia's good mood turned foul.

Unaware of what was going on in Leticia's heart, Elstead politely bowed.

"It is an honour to meet you, Lady Mavis[1] I am Royce van Elstead. I have been given the title of Count from His Highness. Pleased to make your acquaintance."

"Nice to meet you, Count Elstead. So, what is this commotion?"

"What, I was just letting this plebeian know that he was beyond his station, being in this palace by chance. I was telling him to leave."

While bowing, Count Elstead stared at Leticia's right hand, which was holding onto Wynn's left hand.

The lackeys' faces showed signs of unrest.

At those words, Leticia took a deep breath.

She was trying to suppress the anger that was building up inside.

"Count Elstead."

Even so, she was unable to keep the cold tone from her voice.

"This personage is my master, Wynn Byrd-sama. Even if he is of unknown pedigree, as my Master, he is still an acquaintance of His Majesty, the Emperor."

“What!?”

“The Brave’s master?”

“By the way, I heard a rumour about a young plebeian being...”

They simultaneously shouted in surprise at Leticia’s words.

The nobles that joined the banquet that celebrated the end of the coup d’etat were those of high rank, powerful noble factions, and those who performed meritorious deeds.

Being a weak noble, Count Elstead did not receive an invitation.

His face suddenly turned pale.

The one recognized by the Emperor as the “Master of the Brave.”

He might be the empire’s most influential person.

Belatedly, they recalled the maid’s words.

‘These people are the honoured friends of Her Highness the Princess, whom she had invited.’

As the Brave herself, and as an eminent noble, Leticia’s actions showed that their relationship was more intimate than that of a master and disciple.

They seemed to have finally realize that their earlier remarks and attitudes up to this point could be taken as actions that can be glared at by a poor man who has the backing of the overwhelming power of the Imperial and Duke families.

“Speaking of which, the Master of the Brave is said to be a classmate of the

Princess.”

However, while the lackeys exclaimed in surprise, and regretting their previous attitudes, they timidly compared Leticia and Wynn, and only Count Elstead continued to talk, his expression unchanged.

‘Oh, as expected of the head of a small faction.’

Locke mentally reappraised Count Elstead.

Despite being faced with Leticia’s wrathful gaze a while ago, he received it straightforwardly.

Even though she had the appearance of a beautiful young lady, her body concealed the strength that could oppose a whole country, and she even held a high status in the court.

In her eyes, the noble lackeys were insignificant beings

However, despite all of that, he had a good amount of courage.

‘Is he judging her by her appearance?’

Locke thought, while closely examining Count Elstead.

“This day, Master and I have been invited by Her Highness Cornelia. There are no problems with his being here, right?”

“But what about that thing on his waist? When meeting royalty, how can we allow a dangerous weapon?”

“You mean that dagger?”

Wynn wore a dagger at his waist.

Following Count Elstead’s finger, Leticia deliberately smiled.

Then, after letting go of Wynn’s hand, she turned around, and, without minding that her dress would wrinkle, she reverently knelt down, and slowly drew the dagger.

The surroundings murmured, as the Brave, and a Duke’s daughter, to show such overwhelming respect towards a commoner like Wynn; but a larger stir was created with her next words.

“This dagger is the one that I personally gifted to Master.”

She showed the words engraved on the blade to Count Elstead.

It was the coat of arms of this country— the emblem of the Royal Family.

And on the other side was the Coat of Arms of the Mavis house.

“This, this is...!”

Even Count Elstead, who, at least on the surface, had appeared unperturbed until that point, widened his eyes upon seeing the crest on the blade.

“This dagger was conferred to me by His Highness, when I was born. It is proof of the right to the throne.”

Flabbergasted, Count Elstead became silent.

‘I was given such an important thing!’

On the other hand, even Wynn was speechless.

Although it did not have a single scratch on it, he had used it as a mere weapon, letting it face the explosion from a magic attack.

Although he had carefully maintained it, in a sense, he realized that he had treated something as valuable as a national treasure disrespectfully.

‘Will I face divine punishment?’

Locke, who had accompanied Wynn in the dagger throwing lessons, sent Wynn, who had broken into a cold sweat, a look of sympathy.

“This is the proof of my trust in him.”

Leticia held the dagger out while smiling.

Wynn stared holes into the extended hand.

Up until then, he had been casually wearing a national treasure on his waist.

He hesitated to touch it.

However, Leticia merely smiled tenderly, her eyes urging Wynn to take the dagger.

Reluctantly, Wynn, with more care than before, accepted the dagger and placed it into its scabbard.

That dagger was one of Wynn’s countermeasures against magic.

It was now impossible to use it as he had, and he absolutely couldn’t use it for

practice. He vowed to be much more careful when maintaining it.

“...If that is the case, I have no choice but to concede.”

“Then, we have kept Her Highness waiting.”

The maid nodded, and bowed deeply and carefully to Count Elstead, before walking on ahead.

Wynn felt nervous around the nobles who were glaring at him, and, upon seeing that, Leticia once again grabbed his arm, and dragged him away.

Wynn just bowed down in deference to them.

“Hey, that hurts, and your chest is touching me.”

“Shut up! Onii-chan should just silently follow me!”

Wynn was strongly dragged along, as Leticia walked.

Chuckling behind the pair, Locke bowed to Count Elstead and the others, then chased after them—

“They’re still kids. Is that their weak point?”

Unconsciously turning around, Elstead and his lackeys were already walking in the opposite direction, their expressions unseen.

“What is it? Locke, we’ll leave you behind, you know?”

"Ah, I'll go now."

Of course, as the Princess's guest, the maid wouldn't actually leave Locke behind, but he still replied.

As he walked quickly to catch up to Wynn and Leticia, he once again looked back at Count Elstead, getting a bad feeling, but they had already turned the corner, their figures unseen.

When he returns home, he would ask for information from his father and elder brother.

His best friend, and the girl who was his childhood friend, wouldn't be hindered by the inevitable obstacles.

Count Elstead had showed surprising courage to face Leticia head-on.

Speeding up to follow the two, Locke, as a person who knew the dangers of being deceived by appearances, etched the name Royce van Elstead into his memory.

### Translator Notes

1. Japanese includes the fact that she is the third child (female) of a duke

## Chapter 30: Nobles and Commoners ③

“Count Royce van Elstead, is it?”

Cornelia set down the cup of tea, and tilted her head as she thought.

“Of course, I remember that he started working in the capital two or three years ago. I think Count Elstead’s territory is near the border.”

They were in the palace’s courtyard.

Cornelia waited for Wynn and the two others at a garden table, which was prepared with various sweets and a tea set.

The tea party consisted of only four people.

Since Wynn was completely unrelated to the castle, it would have been very likely for him to have gotten lost.

Wynn was finally able to feel somewhat relieved from that tension upon being surrounded by familiar faces, even though his clothing and situation were a little different.

That being said, there were several maids attending to them, so it wasn’t only the four of them.

Under that open sky— The feeling of that open air in the garden, it must have

helped him feel relieved from the tension.

The lawn was covered in soft grass, and countless trees were planted there.

After being carefully picked by the palace's exclusive gardener, fresh flowers bloomed beautifully and elegantly, giving the surroundings a completely different atmosphere compared to within the palace.

Seeming to forget about the maids waiting on them, he exhaled in relief.

As expected of the maids who work in the castle.

They enjoyed the freshly baked sweets and the tea.

The tea and sweets were definitely high-class goods.

Even an ordinary commoner like Wynn— though he had deviated from being one recently— upon seeing the appetizing sweets before his eyes, couldn't resist reaching his arm out towards them.

Meanwhile, Leticia, as a Duke's daughter, and Locke, as the son of a merchant family, had both often associated with nobles, and were composedly sipping their tea.

He didn't know the appropriate etiquette because he wasn't taught it, but such a firm action was definitely a faux pas[1].

At first, Wynn had reached towards the sweets half in desperation, but Leticia moved the sweets out of reach, enjoying her chance to tease him.

He couldn't merely spew thoughtless words. He would lose if he didn't eat.

His commoner nature was laid bare.

While eating and drinking, they talked about mundane topics, but the conversation shifted to the recent incident.

"It seems that Count Elstead was elevated to Count of a frontier territory a few years ago, but, as I started investigating him, it seems that many terrible rumours have sprung up."

"It's because he's a fat bald toad. Just judging by his outward appearance, he's bad, but it seems that he has some shady dealings in the underworld."

"Fat bald toad?"

Cornelia tilted her head upon hearing Locke's words.

"The Count. It's what I named him. He's slimy, fat, and bald."

Remembering the moment when their hands touched, Locke rubbed his hands against his clothes with a disgusted expression.

Not understanding his gestures, Leticia looked slightly confused.

“You’re being rude to the Count. Well, even I don’t think much of him. Fat bald toad, was it?... Well... I think it’s a fitting way to describe him in a few words..”

“Wynn also thinks that way?”

Seeing the three different reactions, only Cornelia, who hadn’t met Count Elstead in person, smiled wryly.

“Come to think of it, I think that I received a portrait of Count Elstead several years ago.”

The maid bowed, then returned to the castle.

After a short while, she returned with a painting.

“Ah, here it is. One of the portraits sent to me as a fiancé candidate.”

The maid laid the painting on the garden table, as the other three peered at it.

“Who is this?”

Then, Leticia spoke in confusion—

“Wow, the artist’s amazing!”

Locke roared with laughter upon seeing it, slapping the table.[2]

“Hey-hey-hey, who is this? Isn’t this too much beautification? What the heck!? How much money did he shell out to get this painted!? The artist who painted the portrait is truly amazing! If I told my dad, the Marine house would gladly patronize this artist.”

The person in the portrait was a beautiful youth[3] with blond hair, blue eyes, and a well-proportioned body

The person in the portrait sported a soft, warm smile, and did not resemble the actual Count Elstead, the fat bald toad, at all.[4]

“This, could this be a portrait of some other person?”

“No, Onii-chan. It’s signed right here, see?”

Leticia pointed at the bottom of the painting, and sure enough, the name ‘Royce van Elstead’ was inscribed there.

The frame was also engraved with the Elstead coat of arms, so it shouldn’t have been a different person.

“This is on the level of fraud. If in the one-in-a-million chance[5] Cornelia-sama summoned the actual person, I would like to see how he would gloss it over. I really want to hear his explanation! I also want to see your faces when you meet!!”

Locke continued laughing, to the point that tears were flowing from his eyes.

“Is he that different from the person depicted in this portrait?”

“It’s a completely different person!”

“Wait a minute, Locke. If you look closely, the face does slightly resemble the actual person.”

Locke looked at the place Wynn pointed at—

“Isn’t that only the hair!? Well, the hair certainly is drawn thinly. It’s only the feeling. What a brute[6] that Count is! I could die of laughter!”

“Anyways, what is the status of your engagement?”

Pulling away slightly from the laughing Locke, Leticia asked Cornelia.

“I declined them.”

“Well, that’s good.”

Locke nodded.

“I have said it before, but I investigated the bad rumours about that person...

He brings young maidens that live in his territory into his estate and..."

"That's cruel..."

Leticia frowned.

"Why do we leave those sorts of nobles be?"

"The Count two generations ago had contributed greatly to the empire, and so he inherited that power. The previous Count died a sudden death, but the Count before him had risen up the ranks to become a general. Besides the Count two generations ago, the Elstead Family had produced other generals."

"Speaking of... when we shook hands, his hands were surprisingly thick. So he came from a degraded military family?"

"In addition to these constant bad rumours, the Countdom's financial state is also steadily declining."

Locke recalled that Count Elstead's messenger was in debt to the Marine house.

Nevertheless, it wasn't only the knights that had rotted, the whole country's upper echelons may have rotten away.

After that, they returned to more mundane topics, and by the time the sweets had cooled down, the sweets were wrapped up, and they dispersed.

## Translator Notes

- 1.an embarrassing or tactless act or remark in a social situation —back
- 2.sfx: Dondon —back
- 3.Most of you know what a bishounen is, but this is a biseinen —back
- 4.Don't actually fat-shame anybody IRL!!! —back
- 5.actually used ten thousand in the raws, since chinese and japanese numbers do the equivalent of putting commas every four digits. —back
- 6.brute, in the sense that he is a deplorable person

# Chapter 31: Approaching Shadows ①

In order to subjugate the bandit group, the group of adventurers Abel joined advanced from the Capital, and made camp near Torc Village, an ordinary village that could be found anywhere.

Judging by previous raids, that village would be one of the possible targets in the next raid.

A lone adventurer ran from within the forest at full speed towards Torc Village.

He was an adventurer that had gone to scout the surroundings.

Since scouting was his specialty, he would normally have been able to traverse through the poor footing in the forest quickly.

However, he moved with a limping gait.

Even when he tripped over roots or ditches, and fell in dangerous places, he frantically got up and continued running.

Due to his haste, his judgment had declined.

He had joined a group of adventurers who specialized in scouting, and left the village a little while before.

Thus, was it good luck, or bad luck, that some of them were able notice it?

As they walked along the narrow forest trail, they suddenly had a bad feeling.

They listened closer, and heard a sound that didn't belong in the forest: the clanking of metal.

He signaled to his partner, then concealed their presence as they advanced.

Before their eyes, they saw a scene in the clearing below the cliff.

“Wh-what is this? These...”

He was in the middle of reconnaissance.

Even though they eliminated as much noise as they could as they moved, he accidentally let out a groan.

There were hairy men clad in leather armour

Freely holding weapons, they occasionally let out vulgar laughs.

They were most likely members of the bandit group.

They numbered about a hundred people.

That was a bigger scale than they had assumed, but there was a more pressing problem.

The problem was that, mixed among the bandits, marching silently— the word marching was truly appropriate— was a group of people clad in uniformed armour and spears.

They also numbered around a hundred people.

In total, it was a group numbering two hundred people.

‘This... Isn’t this a bandit group? It isn’t an army, right?’

The number of adventurers participating in the bandit subjugation was around 30 people.

All together, they were a medium-sized fighting force.

Even against a group of one hundred bandits, three times their numbers, the adventurers would have had no problems, since they could use magic and cooperated well.

However, marching before their eyes was a group clad in armour.

They were definitely different.

When they looked closer, they could see that their faces differed from those of the empire.

‘The neighboring country, Petersia[1] Kingdom!’

Once the scouts realized the true identity of those men, their backs trembled.

They had heard rumours that the Petersia Kingdom had expanded its military.

But even if the tense relationship between the empire and the kingdom deteriorated, they shouldn't have ended up at war.

Despite this, they had entered the empire.

Moreover, despite the substantial information network of the Adventurer's Guild, they had not noticed their movements.

If it were a wet-behind-the-ears bandit group, even though two hundred people would be a bit much, they weren't unbeatable.

However, if among them were a hundred trained soldiers, it was a different story.

There were undoubtedly knights among them.

Almost all of the knights would be able to use magic.

Moreover, when comparing their magic to that of the commoner adventurers, they were generally stronger.

—Annihilation.

That word hung in their heads.

Just when he was about to give the evacuation signal to his partner—

He saw his partner on the ground, an arrow sprouting from his temple.

“Guh!”

As he hurried to get up, something pierced his left shoulder.

Enduring the pain, he desperately ran for his life.

It was natural, if one thought about it.

Unlike if it were only a bandit group, the armour-clad soldiers from Petersia

would definitely have sentries in their surroundings.

As much as he could, he avoided going in a straight line, and hid behind the thickets and groves as he ran desperately.

He absolutely couldn't let this go unreported.

If the ones who were based in the village didn't know about the army's existence, only annihilation lied in their future.

'Those bastards! They killed him!'

He was crushed by vexation as he ran.

What happened to the army guarding the border?

Out of the whole imperial army, only a small fraction were involved in the coup d'état incident.

Though a hundred people was relatively small, it was impossible that there was no news of foreign soldiers within the country.

He kept running as fast as he could.

Luckily, there were no more arrows fired at him.

He was anxious to speed up his pace, but he was already faster than the average person.

He wasn't worried about the footing in the forest, which was his specialty, but the pursuers behind him filled him with great dread.

He didn't realize it.

His pursuers, as scouts, were also practiced in moving through the bad footing of the forest.

So, they made full use of the signs pointing the way to their base...

The big wooden building in the center of Torc Village was used both as an assembly hall, and as a space for festivals and celebrations.

The adventurers who were visiting to subjugate the bandits were borrowing the space.

However, since it wasn't big enough to accommodate everyone, they mostly camped outside of the small huts around the assembly hall, while female adventurers and night sentries stayed in the buildingcabin.

In that small hut, the adventurers undertaking the bandit subjugation mission gathered, as the villagers anxiously surrounded the hut, looking at them.

Seated in the center was the leader of the adventurer alliance, Riggs.

In front of him, the adventurer who had just returned from scouting was undergoing treatment for the arrow wound to his shoulder, reporting how his comrade died.

“...The Petersian Army...”

Everybody was lost for words.

It was a threat beyond their expectations.

Even those who were normally very optimistic were silent, uneasily looking at

their comrade's faces around them.

Soon, the scout's report finished, and the surrounding adventurers' gazes all focused on Riggs, their leader.

Riggs sat cross-legged and with his arms crossed, silently listening to the report with his eyes closed.

"Hey, what do we do? Riggs?"

At last, an impatient voice addressed their silently thinking leader, and Riggs opened his eyes.

"There is no choice but to run away."

Every person drew their breaths when they heard that.

Since it was within their expectations, there was a general mood of acceptance.

Previously, they had investigated the bandit group they were to subjugate in various ways.

They visited the damaged villages, and the sites of the raided caravans and investigated the areas carefully.

A peculiar point arose as they investigated each site.

All of the people in the villages and caravans that were attacked were killed, without exception.

There were varying intervals between raids, and the locations were widespread.

Many times, the imperial army had organized a subjugation mission, but they all ended up empty-handed.

However, if the Petersia Kingdom was involved, that meant that it was the result of some sort of military maneuver.

But the piece of the puzzle that didn't fit was...

Among the adventurers who had agreed with Riggs' judgement to run away—

“Please wait a minute!”

Riggs shifted his attention to the owner of that voice.

It was Abel, who was in the corner of the hut.

“Running away means that we aren’t fighting? Riggs-san.”

“Do you think you can win? If you think so, then you would never be an accomplished adventurer. Only death awaits in your future.”

Riggs cool-headed pointed that out.

Abel momentarily looked downwards, but then looked up, straight at Riggs's eyes.

"If we run, then what will happen to the people of this village? They can't fight. Won't they be killed?"

"I guess so. That's why we get them to run away. Well, there's no time. We need to hurry up and prepare to escape!"

Riggs clapped his hands once.

At that, the adventurers nodded emphatically, stood up, and left the hut in groups.

"Hey, wait a minute. We, being more or less trained, can run away. But, what about the villagers?"

Abel tried to talk to his adventurer mentors, who were busy moving about, but they merely smiled, and patted his shoulder without saying anything, before leaving with only their equipment.

Soon, only Riggs, several female adventurers, and Abel and two other novice adventurers remained in the hut.

The other two novices, like Abel, also harboured doubts — unlike the other veteran adventurers who knew what to do from Riggs's command — and were left in the hut.

Riggs gestured for them to come closer.

“Now then, you all should prepare to flee. It will be really soon yanno? I've said many times that we have no time.”

“Riggs-san, what about the villagers?”

"Isn't that why I said that they would also flee?"

"If it's only us, then we might be able to flee, but I don't think the people of the village can fight, nor can they flee."

Abel's red-faced outburst reminded Riggs of himself when he was a novice.

He had thought that he could do anything.

In other words, trying to be a hero without understanding the circumstances, from an adventurer's perspective, it's obviously a bad aspiration.

Of course, everybody went through a phase where they aspired to become an adventurer.

If they didn't die an early death, and were lucky enough to survive until they gained enough experience, they would become excellent adventurers.

That was why:

“Who did you say wouldn’t fight?”

“Eh?”

These young, inexperienced adventurers hadn’t realized his own heroic aspirations[2], but would grow to become great adventurers.

“The ones running away are the villagers, you guys, and the women. The remaining adventurers will fight against them.”

“Eh? Eh?”

Unable to understand what was just said, Abel just blinked, and the energy he had until then dissipated.

Riggs smiled at that sight.

He honestly had not expected that the bandit subjugation mission would turn out like this.

He was prepared to some extent, so he brought along some green adventurers, planning to let them gain experience, thinking they would have that much room to spare.

However, it was the worst case scenario.

If he had to pick the best card to play, it would only be this card.[3]

‘So, in the end, even I also want to be a hero, don’t I?’

Mentally, Riggs laughed at the irony.

Well, they are people who aim to become adventurers.

Now, the adventurers who all followed Riggs's plans and began to prepare for battle, also, held that same heroic aspirations.

"I'll also fight."

'Sheesh, I can't laugh at his resolve.'

Concealing his inner thoughts with a glare, Riggs shouted with a strict voice.

"You're a burden. You can do nothing but escape."

Then, Riggs gave another order.

“You all will run to Nest Village. With your pace, if you leave now, you should arrive in the afternoon. There, report the situation to the soldiers. The Petersian army is hiding in this territory.”

Nodding, the female adventurers immediately began to collect their luggage.

They were also experienced adventurers.

They weren't being kept away from danger because they were female.

They understood the importance of conveying this news.

Also, they would be able to guide others back here.

Then, they could fight.

Riggs gave the excuse of reporting the information for them to run away.

With that, they wouldn't be filled with a desire to be a hero and return to the village.

The female adventurers hurried the two novices out.

Even Abel, although he was unable to agree with not fighting, he was also pushed out.

“Abel. You are going to the capital.”

“Why, why am I the only one going to the capital!?”

The capital would take a week to reach by horse.

If he went to Nest, he would have time to join the soldiers and fight.

However, he couldn't possibly make it to the battle if he went to the capital.

“It's not just you. I don't think that the invading Petersian army is just this. That's why, the capital also has to know.”

“But even then, why me?”

“If it’s you, you can tell Wynn, right?”

The boy who aspired to be a knight.

Abel’s rival in love, who was a knight cadet.

Of course, if it was his words, they would reach the capital.

In the end, Riggs’s real intention was to report this to Leticia

As the Brave, Leticia wouldn’t be able to move, but if it were a request from a Duke’s daughter, even the slow-to-act imperial army in the capital would seriously act.

“That’s why, hurry.”

“But, Riggs-san and the others...”

“Hey, hey, do you think we’ll die that easily? Are you making fun of us? We fight monsters more atrocious than humans. Also, if you guys hurry, the chances we will be saved will increase.”

“Riggs-san... I’ll believe in you!”

Cursing under his breath, Abel ran out.

A small smile broke out on Riggs’s face as he watched that back.

His gait was unsteady.

His heart pounded furiously.

‘No doubt, I will die.’

He believed it.

But even then—

He wouldn't just be killed.

He would keep on struggling to the end.

Anyhow, he had a girl he was close to.

She wouldn't expect that they were in a hopeless situation.

However, she will overcome this and live on, and find happiness with her loved ones.

‘Compared to Leticia-chan, this sort of crisis isn't a big deal.’

“Okay, we're gonna do this!”

Riggs raised his voice.

In unison, the other adventurers replied with an “Oo!” and raised their spirits.

### Translator Notes

2. This kanji appears multiple times, and seems to have something to do with a heroic altruistic self-sacrifice 英雄願望 (hero complex, maybe)

## Chapter 32: Approaching Shadows ②

“...and that is the situation. I apologize. We will buy you time with all we can. You should evacuate as soon as you can!”

The adventurers gathered in the assembly hall in the center of Torc Village were hurriedly moving around with serious expressions on their faces.

Some of the adventurers rushed out of the village square.

Their faces were haunted by grim looks.

Even though the villagers surrounding the assembly hall did not understand the situation, just by observing the adventurers, they knew that the situation had taken a turn for the worse.

Here and there, anxious voices broke out.

A girl among the villagers was unable to hide her anxiety and hugged her father’s arm.

They had wanted to hear about the situation, but the villagers couldn't interrupt as the adventurers ran about, yelling angrily.

They could only grind their teeth and watch.

The man who introduced himself as the leader of the adventurers in the assembly hall when they had arrived stepped forward.

Finally able to find out the situation, several villagers simultaneously asked for an explanation, and the man named Riggs started to explain exactly what was happening.

About how the village was targeted by a bandit group.

How the group was on the scale of two hundred men.

About how there seemed to be Petersian soldiers among them.

About how there was already a casualty from the adventurers who had scouted before.

How, given the current battle power, victory was unlikely, so they should flee to the neighboring town, Nest.

“So we’re abandoning our hometown?”

“Didn’t we request for you all to protect us!?”

Upon being told by Riggs to abandon their hard-earned work and beloved birthplace, the villagers drew near, raising their voices.

But—

“Quiet!”

At Riggs’s roar, the villagers were instantly silenced.

He was still the leader of the adventurer group— even if they were normally different parties, all mixed together.

He was different from the simple villagers.

Scanning the silent villagers, Riggs opened his mouth.

“Don’t you see? You don’t have time to complain, and I don’t have time to listen to the complaints. Frankly, I don’t have the time to persuade you. So I’ll say this clearly. Alone, we cannot win against the bandit group and the Petersian army. If you don’t want to die, evacuate. Risk your lives and make for Nest. If you survive, you can return to your hometown. But if you die, that’s it. That’s all I have to say! It is your choice. Do as you please. That’s all.”

Saying that all in one breath, Riggs turned around and walked back to where the other adventurers were.

The villagers could only stare in surprise.

Nobody was even able to voice their concerns.

Riggs's back exuded a bloodcurdling presence.

As he left, his words, which were in no way a joke, showed that the urgency of the situation was real.

“H-hey... what do we do?”

“Either way, we had better flee, as he said.”

The villagers slowly and sluggishly started moving.

Their faces were still in disbelief; was it all a lie? The doubt hung in the air, but they still started their preparations to evacuate.

“Daddy?”

“A-ah, let’s also prepare to flee.”

The girl was pulling at her dumbfounded father’s arm, so he also started walking.

They returned home, and explained the situation to the girl’s mother.

The girl’s mother, frankly, also seemed doubtful, but she helped her husband load and secure their belongings onto the cart.

She also began preparations.

In the first place, the village was in no way plentiful.

So they didn’t really have many important belongings.

They soon finished their preparations.

‘That’s right! The seeds and things that can be sold should...’

Glancing at her parents, who were loading tools for daily life, she headed for the shed where the harvest and wild plants picked from the mountains were stored.

They didn't know how long they would need to take refuge.

The discussions mentioned a foreign army being involved.

If the the village was captured, then they would not be able to easily return.

In the worst case, they may even have to evacuate Nest Town.

The remaining scraps of medicinal herbs and bark, which were used to make medicinal pills, were also loaded onto the cart.

They could sell them to a general store or apothecary.

Although they wouldn't be sold for a high price, it was better than nothing.

As she did this, the other villagers were also preparing to evacuate, and started to gather on the road towards Nest Town.

"Several adventurers will go ahead to Nest Town to request the feudal lord

for reinforcements from the imperial army."

The girl's father was speaking to a villager acquaintance.

Nest Town was a town that expanded around the knight order stationed at a fort there.

Several years before, when a monster horde approached, devastating the surrounding villages and townspeople, the refugees established a small town centered around the fort.

Even the district's feudal lord, since the city from which he governed was also destroyed, moved to Nest Town.

Due to that, there were two groups of imperial troops stationed at Nest Town, the feudal lord's army, and the knight order.

If both the feudal lord's army and the knight order hastened to reinforce the adventurers, they might be able to return to their homes sooner than they thought.

Compared to when Riggs spoke, the villagers felt more optimistic.

Meanwhile, the adventurers were gathered on the other side of the village, near the mountain trail.

After being able to somehow persuade the reluctant villagers, they demolished some of the cabins to build a barricade, in order to intercept the bandits that would emerge from the mountain trail.

The girl sat beside her mother, watching the scene.

She watched as the desolate landscape changed before her eyes and committed it to memory.

Suddenly, she saw a young adventurer boy set off on horseback in a different direction than Nest.

He was about the same age as her.

Since he was riding on horseback, she soon lost sight of him between the trees. However, it seemed like he was crying for some reason.

It was probably her imagination.

There was no way she would be able to see the face of a person riding away on horseback.

“That way is the capital.”

Her father murmured to her, who gazed at the direction the horse went..

“For them to head to both the feudal lord and the capital, it seems that it will be a few years before we’ll be able to return home. Why does this have to happen right now, at this moment?”

Nobody knew how the feudal lord’s army and the knights stationed at Nest Town would move.

They received news that reinforcements were sent for, so the villagers’ mood improved, but the villagers still remained anxious, walking in silence.

Although there were women and children carrying luggage all the way to Nest Town, if they didn’t rest and forced themselves to march all the way there, they could arrive by the afternoon.

For that, the adventurers who went before them would both report the information, and help prepare their refuge beside the town.

There were some townspeople who would refuse to give shelter to them, but the district’s feudal lord was generous towards his people, and would protect

them.

But there was still worry that the situation would deteriorate.

He didn't know how much time it had been since he left the village.

“Those are knights... from Nest Town![1]”

When the sun was high in the sky, those with low stamina, the children and the elderly, took turns riding the cart as the villagers moved.

Among them the girl walked, her head hanging, just staring at the ground, when one of the villagers walking near the front raised his voice.

They could certainly see people riding horses in front of them.

There were quite a few people.

“We-we’re saved. They’re from Nest.”

Relief washed over them.

She also felt all the strength leave her body, feeling relieved.

Her father was leading them to Nest Town, but she had also gone there many times.

Her main purpose was to sell their produce, and use the money to buy goods.

They were largely self-sufficient, and could buy goods from the peddlers that periodically visited, but there were some things that couldn’t be bought outside the town.

Therefore, they had to go to the town several times a year.

Since it was a newly-developed town, it was much smaller than other cities in the empire, but since it was a developing town, it had a vibrant nature.

Moreover, she was also familiar with[2] the old Nest Town that was destroyed by monsters.

That was why, even though Nest was a small town to non-locals, it was a place that the girl yearned for.

When they needed to take some time shopping, they stayed at the usual inn.

To her, going shopping in the city rivalled the village's harvest festival as one of the most enjoyable events of the year.

She had many strong memories about Nest Town.

That day, four years ago— this region was attacked by a horde of monsters.

Just like now, her parents, with the other villagers, fled to Nest Town.

They fled from the the monsters flooding from the mountain and the forest, barely reaching the fort with their lives

However, it was miserable within the fort.

All over the place, there were seriously injured people lying on the ground, groaning.

Among them, there were also those who had already died.

At that time, deaths were not uncommon, but that many deaths was unprecedented.

There was terror of the approaching death.

Outside the fort, the shrieks of people who were late to flee and the howls of monsters could be heard.

Within the fort, there were screams of half-crazed people, and also weak moans and cries.

There were also people who rebuked the surviving knights.

They cried for the knights to help fight, to help extend their lives.

Held in her parents arms, she could only watch as it happened.

She was only a child, powerless, and could only shiver in fear.

However, a single girl appeared before her eyes.

The people called this girl—"The Brave".

#### Translator Notes

1. Nest City or Nest Village sound okay, but Nest Town doesn't... Is it because people were so lazy that all of the "Nest Towns" turned into "Nesttons"? Apparently I forgot that it wasn't only Muricans do it...

## Chapter 33: Approaching Shadows ③

Two of the nearby villages were destroyed by the monster horde.

The news was spread by the peddlers who happened to notice it and escaped the attacked areas. The village chief immediately relayed the decision to abandon the village and flee.

The place they fled to was Nest Fortress.

The chief judged that it would be the safest place since the knight order was stationed there.

However, the four-legged monsters could move quickly.

Luckily, they would be escorted by the knights who were previously notified, so the villagers of Torc Village could reach the fort.

However, villagers fleeing from places beyond Torc Village came sustaining serious injuries.

The backs of the people desperately making for the fortress showed slashes by claws and large bites from jaws.

Even the many knights who had sortied to save the villagers were killed, one after another.

Against the approaching swarm of monsters that buried the earth, they had to close the gates that they had fought to the limit to open so that even one more of the myriad of refugees could enter.

But the gate was useless against monsters who could fly, and even the massive stone wall could not be trusted to hold back the larger monsters.

The diminishing knights desperately fortified their defenses, but even a child like her could see that it was a hopeless endeavour.

The monsters howled incessantly outside the fort.

The fort's outer walls occasionally trembled.

If the flying monsters started attacking, the fort would have already fallen to the monsters.

It was as if they were trying to prolong their despair and terror.

Some people, half-crazed in despair, blamed their surroundings.

Just to avoid being slain by the monsters, some have jumped off of the main tower, committing suicide.

In one section of the fort, people merely curled up in despair and terror.

The girl could only tremble.

She didn't bawl, but merely cried softly, as her body trembled in her mother's arms.

Flying overhead, avian monsters let out eerie cries.

Every time they heard the strange cries, the people ducked their heads and crawled on the ground.

Then, when the monsters flew away, without fail, the people's gazes gathered on the main tower.

They heard from the knights that the one who was proclaimed the Brave by the Goddess Anastasia was there.

What was the Brave doing?

Why didn't she drive away the monsters?

In their dread, the people started to murmur complaints towards the Brave.

Everybody, including the girl, felt resentment that the existence called the Brave would hole up in the main tower and hide.

—Until they saw that girl.

That girl walked through the people, who were startled by the door to the main tower opening; her back was straight, and her expression was cold.

That girl seemed to be about the same age as herself, or maybe even younger.

Although she was still in her childhood, her beautiful face betrayed no fear, even in the face of such terribleness, as she smiled to encourage the frightened people.

‘It’s Brave-sama.’

She herself couldn’t tell just by looking at her appearance, but from the whispers around her, she knew that the girl who walked out of the tower was the Brave.

Despite only getting a fleeting glimpse, that girl’s appearance was clearly burned in her mind.

She walked towards the fort’s gates, and soon...

Monsters roared and screamed.

Booms and crashes continued.

The monster's death cries were heard.

Not wanting to hear the sounds they heard outside, they desperately closed their eyes and covered their ears; they kept their guard up for a long time.

Eventually, sounds outside the fort ceased— the girl called the Brave opened the gate to the fort and returned.

That girl's body was covered in wounds.

From her brilliant golden hair, which was like collected sunlight, to her flawless white skin, her whole body was stained by both her blood and the monster's blood.

That girl's whole body still continued to emit a strong fighting spirit, which the surrounding people could feel unconsciously and were left speechless, and she dragged her feet towards them.

Pitying that appearance, the girl wanted to call out to her when—

“You can’t.”

Her father pulled on her arm.

She looked up at her father’s face, and saw it filled with terror.

She obeyed her father’s words, and once more looked at her.

She couldn’t even begin to imagine how hard of a battle it was, and the wounds on her body must be extremely painful.

How dreadful was it to have faced the killing intent of all of those monsters.

She couldn't fathom it.

The Brave returned after destroying all of the monsters and protecting the fort, but didn't receive even a word of gratitude. Instead, everybody's gazes were filled with the same fear and dread that her father showed.

For whose sake did she fight for...?

Only one person, the Elven woman who was her companion, went to hug her.

Incidentally, the two girls' gazes met.

At that moment, she realized.

That girl's eyes were red and swollen.

Despite that, that girl smiled towards her, as if encouraging her.

Her own tears spilled out.

It must have been due to the relief after all of that terror, that she started to cry.

Despite being wounded to the point of tears, that girl could still smile at her.

Seeing that pitiful figure, more tears spilled out.

Her tenderness also conveyed the isolation and loneliness she felt...

It had been roughly four years since then.

“We-we’re saved. They’re from Nest...”

At those words, the fear and despair from that time came back.

Then, she thought of the Brave, the girl who was the same age as her.

Was she able to attain happiness after defeating the Demon Lord?

That girl who was known as the Brave probably didn't remember the time when their eyes met.

But if she had the chance to meet her someday, she would clearly convey her gratitude.

‘Thank you very much.’

Just that one sentence.

She recalled the relief of barely having made it to Nest with her life.

Maybe the other villagers felt the same way.

It was inevitable that they relaxed from the tension.

However—

She felt a sense of unease.

Her parents were simply as elated as the other villagers.

The sense of unease grew larger.

They were somehow tricked.

Suddenly, she thought of the adventurer boy around the same age as her who had ridden in a different direction.

According to the conversation between her father and one of the villagers, there had also been several adventurers who went ahead to notify Nest Town.

Those adventurers were also young, and had also ridden horses to Nest Town

However, shouldn't the imperial army stationed at Nest have arrived on horseback first?

When she reached that conclusion, she felt bone-chilling dread.

'Those might be allies of the bandits!'

By the time she arrived at that conclusion, the knights who were on horseback had reached their group.

"Th-they're not from Nest!"

"Uwaaaaaaaa! They're from Petersiaaaaaaaaaa!!!!"

The villagers tried to flee, but were trampled to death or pierced by lances.

“GAAAAAH!!”

“Daddy! We—”

The girl’s father was blown away by a horse and the cart was jolted, so her slender body also toppled sideways.

With a crash, all of the luggage scattered into the air, as the cart turned over.

She was dimly aware of the cart falling down upon her— then, everything turned black.

When the girl regained her consciousness, it was dark all around her.

No, there was a little bit of light.

She soon realized that the light came from a small crack between the overturned cart and the ground.

‘What is going on?’

Looking around as she raised her upper body, she recalled what had happened.

They were attacked by people who seemed to be the bandit group’s allies.

She remembered the cruel sight of her father on the ground after being sent flying by a horse.

“...!!!”[1]

‘Daddy!’ She was about to call out, then quickly shut her mouth.

She could hear the sound of metallic footsteps around her.

The attackers were still there.

When she listened more closely, she could also hear the sobs of young girls.

Moreover, there were several of them.

She recognized some of those voices. With a shiver, she curled up tightly into a ball.

'I'm scared.'

'I don't want to die.'

'Save me.'

'Scary... scary.'

'Where are Mommy and Daddy?'

'Don't come here.'

'It hurts.'

Her mind raced through various thoughts.

Unlike in Nest Fort, she didn't have her parents to hug.

It seemed that she was hidden in the space between the overturned cart, and a hollow on the ground

There was a small depression beside the path.

When the cart turned over, she happened to be sent flying into the depression, and the cart ended up covering her.

Thanks to the perfect positioning of the cart on the ground, she went unnoticed by the ones who caused this disaster.

If she had been found...

Even though she had never experienced it before, she could understand what was happening outside.

She would definitely have suffered if she had been found.

“It was as we feared, Commander. They were headed to Nest Town.”

“Before we wrap things up, we have to make sure nobody finds out who did it. It’s good that they had female adventurers, but we better end things by letting those bandits handle the rest.”

“Yessir!”

They were speaking somewhere near her.

She held her breath, trembling.

The sobs she didn’t recognize were the adventurers who had gone before them.

In other words, the warning didn’t reach Nest.

The hopes of the adventurers who stayed behind at the village without expecting reinforcements, fighting a hopeless battle, were unfulfilled.

She cried silently.

It was mortifying.

Even then, she couldn't do anything.

She could only continue waiting in the ditch that she had been so lucky to fall into, until the people who assaulted the villagers left.

This time, there wasn't even that girl, the Brave, to save her.

She could only hold her breath and keep hiding.

While covering her ears, as to not hear the screams of the the girls from the village, and the female adventurers.

## Translator Notes

1.I'm imagining a sharp inhalation.

## Chapter 34: Assembly

It had been days since the doubtful news of Petersian army's invasion reached the Knight Order's headquarters, from a certain Knight Cadet.

If it were only a single knight cadet who reported it, the Knight Order headquarters may not have acted.

However, when a Duke's daughter got involved, the significance of that Knight Cadet's report changed.

And if that Duke's daughter's name was Leticia van Mavis, the Brave...

It took the army two days to prepare, and it'll take a week on horseback to reach Nest Town.

When it was reported that the enemy forces were small, an advance party of 500 cavalrymen with high mobility was formed from the organization of the main body of the imperial army.

Among them, were Wynn and Locke.

Wynn was heading home to the Knight School dormitory after finishing his day's work at the Wandering Bird's Roost when he bumped into somebody.

“Woah!”

“Wynn, Wynn!”

“Who? ... Abel!?”

His whole body was smeared with dirt, his face was gaunt, and his eyes glowed with a strange light. He leapt at Wynn with enough force to push him over, and clung to him. It was Abel, the second son of the inn's proprietors.

His appearance had changed to the point that even Wynn, who had known him since childhood, didn't recognize him for a moment.

“Wynn! Wynn! I'm begging you, help them! Help Riggs, help my comrades!”

Abel grabbed Wynn's shoulders with so much strength that Wynn grimaced.

However, Wynn couldn't shake those hands off.

From the shadows under his eyes, he could tell that Abel hadn't slept for a long time.

Moreover, how long had he gone without eating, then?

Wynn recalled the last time they had met, when they duelled in the backyard of the inn.

Compared to his figure of that time, Abel's body had become terribly emaciated, to the point that Wynn was lost for words.

However, upon seeing the strength in Abel's grip and in his eyes, which were completely different from the Abel of that day, Wynn couldn't brush him off.

"Calm down, Abel. What happened? I won't understand if you don't explain."

"Da.... Dam... Damnit! It's Petersia. It's Petersia's army."

"Petersia? As in the neighboring country? You met the Petersian army? Didn't you go on a bandit subjugation mission with the adventurers?"

"Those bastards from the Petersian army disguised themselves as bandits! Shit... I ran away in order to deliver the news... All I could do was run away... I should have already grown up... Riggs-san and the others are still there... They're definitely going to die... Why did I... Shit... shit..."

Abel was clinging to Wynn while crying.

Riggs had also taken care of Wynn when he started visiting the Adventurer's Guild.

He had guided Wynn and Leticia to become adventurers when they were children; he was their benefactor.

Apart from Riggs, there were also other adventurers whom Wynn knew among those who went with Abel.

He believed that they wouldn't die that easily, but against the Petersian knights, even seasoned veterans like Riggs would be at a disadvantage.

In the worst case, the villages around Nest Town, and them would be— "I'll report this to the Knight Order. Calm down and start from the beginning."

Wynn helped the sobbing Abel into the cafeteria of the Wandering Bird's

Roost.

“Wynn? What’s wrong with that drun— ABEL!?<sup>[1]</sup>“

When Hanna realized that the broken, sobbing man Wynn supported was her cute second son, she was about to shriek— she put her hands to her mouth to stifle the sound when she saw Wynn’s stare.

Even though Hanna had known Wynn since he was a small child, this was the first time she had seen Wynn’s eyes with such a strong will.

Wynn gave off the feeling that she shouldn’t say anything.

Hearing his wife’s voice, Randell came out, stopped and gasped.

Even though he was used to the brawls between the adventurers and mercenaries, the intimidating air Wynn gave off overwhelmed him, so much so that he couldn’t approach his son, and made Wynn look completely different.

It was late in the night, but the guests who were still drinking together all fell silent when they noticed the abnormal atmosphere.

“Wynn... You...”

Abel, who was closest to Wynn, looked at Wynn in surprise when he felt Wynn’s presence.

He was a servant who worked at the Wandering Bird’s Roost

He was their gofer.

He was a failure, an eternal knight cadet, only following a dream far above his station.

“You’ve calmed down— Are you alright, Abel? You’re tired and in a bad mood, but please tell us the situation.”

Abel felt that the presence Wynn exerted had an uncanny resemblance to Riggs when he talked to the villagers and newbie adventurers.

Abel had always been jealous of Riggs and the other adventurers’ high estimations of Wynn, always thinking ‘Why is it always him?’

However, after feeling Wynn’s presence directly, he could see why Riggs and other veteran adventurers had those evaluations.

He realized that he wasn't looking at a servant who worked at the inn, but rather Wynn, the person who was still a knight cadet but aspires to become a knight.

"Please..."

Wiping away his tears, Abel slowly explained the situation.

He was sent by Riggs to convey what was happening at Torc Village.

As soon as he heard the situation from Abel, Wynn ran towards the Knight Order headquarters.

Riggs and the other adventurers, whom Wynn had known since he was a child, had entrusted Abel with important information.

For the sake of Abel, who had gone to the point of total exhaustion in order to convey this to Wynn.

Receiving dispatch orders for the campaign, Wynn and Locke went to the plaza in front of the Knight Order headquarters.

The plaza was completely paved with grey stones, giving it a dreary impression, unlike the outskirts of the Knight School building, where shrubbery showed traces that it used to be the old palace's garden.

Upon seeing that absurd scene, Wynn realized that it wasn't a mistake, and that the orders to assemble had really been sent to him. Wynn's anxiety grew.

As he approached the plaza, he saw full-fledged knights, sporting the crest of the Imperial Knight Order, a twin-headed lion, engraved on the chest of their silver armour, wearing a knight's sword on their waist, standing on alert.

Wynn's feet stopped.

Lined up in front of him in an orderly manner, were the knights.

It wasn't the first time that he had seen them fully armed.

He had also worked with fully-armed knights during the periodic subjugation mission.

The time when he and Locke broke into the fort was also the first time he crossed swords against the knights who supported general Zaunas that was led

by Instructor Aldo.

However, unlike the the subjugation mission, which doubled as both a military operation and practice for students, the current gathering was in order to expel enemy forces.

Whether he liked it or not, Wynn felt the tension among the knights.

Right now, before his eyes, the knights of his childhood dreams were spread out.

He was still a student knight cadet, this was a world that was still beyond his imagination— towards that world, he began walking, “Oh? The students are gathered over there. Let’s go.”

Locke’s words brought Wynn back from his thoughts and into reality.

He dazedly followed after Locke, who was walking to where the other apprentice knights and knight cadets were grouped.

“Sorry. I was slightly moved. You’re really calm, aren’t you, Locke?”

“Moved? Well, It’s not like I don’t get it. Maybe it just feels like a practice march to me right now...”

“Nonono, it’s completely different! It’s, kinda like...? The tension is really high.”

“Hmm, now that you mention it... the atmosphere does seem charged. Well, I guess we could die if we fight.”

“That’s right. From now on, we head for battle— we head for war. In a war, some people here will die.”

Locke looked at Wynn, who was walking beside him.

Wynn’s swordsmanship far exceeded that of the others.

He had completely shown that during the Zaunas incident.

Without using magic, without reinforcing his body, his swordsmanship was unequaled, even against senior knights.

He demonstrated why even the strongest Brave called him Master.

But that was only just when the knights didn't use magic.

Wynn's swordsmanship was meaningless on horseback.

That also applied to group fights.

In a group fight, where attack magic flew around, Wynn's techniques were useless.

As a result, the role he was given was—

'As expected, I ended up on reconnaissance.'

He was a scout.

Searching for the enemy was important, but those who followed them were also in danger.

Nonetheless, in Locke's opinion, Wynn was perfect for scout duty.

Wynn, didn't use reinforcement magic on his body, so he wore light armour, and he specialized in striking without letting the opponent having a chance to retaliate.

Since he didn't wear metal armour, he was suitable for covert actions.

It would be surprisingly effective for Wynn to use his superior physical ability in a surprise attack to catch the enemy off guard.

The officer must be capable to be able to make the best use of Wynn's abilities to kill.

"You're so slow! Over here!"

As Wynn and Locke approached the group of students, a short girl waved her hands to greet them.

Beside her stood a student who stuck out from the crowd of students by a head.

"Yo, Wedge, and... Reeno, was it?"

"So mean~ You don't remember my name?"

The short girl who glared at Locke with her hand on her hips was named Reeno, and the strikingly tall boy was called Wedge.

They both achieved good results in the same Apprentice Knight Selection Examination Locke took, and had the qualifications to become apprentice knights.

“I remembered it in the end, didn’t I? I only properly remember the names of cute girls.

“Okay whatever, and this...”

Brushing aside Locke, who was proudly sticking out his chest for no reason, Reeno stood in front of Wynn and looked up at his face.

“You’re Wynn, as in that Wynn?”

“I’m not sure what you mean by ‘that Wynn,’ but I’m probably that Wynn.”

Wynn thought: ‘Leticia is short, but this girl is even shorter,’ as he replied.

“Just like I thought! Hey, Wedge! It really is him. Look, the Wynn, who is rumoured to be Leticia-sama’s Master.”

She hopped back to Wedge, delightedly pulling on his arm, while speaking to him.

Wedge just smiled wryly and put his hand on her head.

Partly due to the height difference, they looked completely like a father and a daughter.

“You’re as taciturn as always, Wedge. And Reeno, did you have some business with us?”

At Locke’s question, Reeno separated from Wedge’s arm and turned towards Wynn and Locke.

“You two arrived so late. The order just arrived, and it seems that we’re in the same group.”

“Oh? A group made of only students?”

“No. It seems that it won’t be just students. Two actual knights will also join the group.”

“Okay.”

“But in the end, I’m the only knight cadet in the group, huh...”

“You’re a cadet, but aren’t you also Leticia-sama’s Master? Nobody gathered here will look down on you.”

Wedge nodded in agreement.

Wynn realized that there weren’t any of the usual malicious stares today.

It wasn’t that there weren’t any stares.

The usual feeling was normally in the background.

“Hey, since Wynn-kun is here, will Leticia-sama come too? ”

“No, it wouldn’t be okay for Leti to come, right? She’s not even a knight.”

Wynn shook his head when Reeno asked him with sparkling eyes.

“Is that so... Too bad. I thought it would be a chance to talk to her...”

“Speaking of, where’s Jade? None of the young masters of high nobility are here?”

“Those people are all with the main force. The people here are all like Wedge and I, lower class nobles, Knight families, all people outside the mainstream.

“So it’s like that.”

Even though the advance party was by no means small, they were at a high risk.

The children of the high class nobles wouldn’t be assigned here.

Then—

“Unsurprisingly, all of the knights assigned here are also those without influence.”

Locke let out a sigh while looking at the men who were walking straight towards them.

They were the two knights.

They would probably become their squad captains.

The four students lined up and greeted their superior officers.

“Tch, commoners are going to be my subordinates...”

Without even trying to hide his sharp remark, the man stood in front of them.

Instead of wearing the sparkling silver armour, he wore leather armour that looked like it was about to burst. There stood Count Elstead— Lieutenant<sup>[2]</sup> Royce, making a grimacing face.

#### Translator Notes

1. She was about to say “drunkard” —back
2. Literally: Leader of Ten Knights, but an actual rank. Roman rank decurion might fit, but I’m not sure if I want to make it into a Roman army... —back

## Chapter 35: Birdcage

When she heard that Wynn had received dispatch orders from the Knight Order, Leticia had naturally wanted to go with him.

But, since she wasn't a knight, she hadn't received permission to join the Imperial Army on its military movements. As a result, she chose to join as Wynn's follower.

There were many cases of nobles and knights having their soldiers and followers accompany them to battle.

Of course, it was unprecedented for a lady of high nobility to become a follower.

However...

"Leticia, you can't go to a battlefield!"

As she made preparations to go to Wynn's side, her father, Lecter van Mavis<sup>[1]</sup>, called out to her.

Lecter grimaced at the sight of the noble lady who wasn't dressed well and wore no makeup.

"You want to become the follower of some plebeian brat!? What are you, a member of the Ducal House, thinking!?"

"I am not acting as a member of the Ducal House. Is there anything improper about a disciple following their master?"

"It's completely improper!"

Lecter stood up from his chair, pounding the ebony desk with his fist.

Lecter remained in that position, glaring at Leticia for a while. He eventually let out a sigh and sat back down in his chair.

"You see, you are now the Brave, and everybody in the world has their eyes on you, Leticia."

"I know."

“Naturally, there is nobody in the surrounding countries who doesn’t know who you are. Even countries who have isolated themselves, and those of other races would know your name. As your father, I am proud that our family name has spread all over the world.”

“Therefore, it is important that you remember that you are the third daughter of the Remulshil Empire’s Duke Mavis. I don’t mind the fact that you have a commoner as your master. There’s no alternative, if it’s true. But you should spread the name of the Baron-dono who was your tutor far and wide as your master.”

“I have no Master other than Wynn Byrd.”

In the first place, she had no memory of being taught anything by that Baron.

In the first place, the young Leticia was a child who couldn’t stand staying still.

More than other people, she was inquisitive, wandering towards whatever caught her interest. Whenever she studied, whether it was reading books with the tutor, or practicing her writing, the birds flying outside the window and the flowers blooming in the garden would catch her interest.

The tutor would scold her harshly every time her eyes left the book.

He spouted abusive words towards Leticia for lazing around, and in the afternoon, during the basic swordplay and martial arts training, he beat her severely with the wooden sword.

It must have been him venting his pent-up frustration from acting as her tutor, since he never got her during the lesson.

Whenever they sparred, she was knocked to the ground— or rather— it would be more accurate to say that she was beaten to the ground.

Her whole body would be covered in bruises.

He broke Leticia’s bones, and gave her cuts and bruises only in places that were not easily visible; The Baron was surprisingly skilled.

As a result, Leticia was labelled a dunce in comparison to her older siblings, and was treated as a black sheep of the Ducal House.

When Leticia’s attending maids, who washed her body and changed her

clothes reported her wounds, the tutor just said that it was his carelessness.

Under the tutor's guidance, her brothers and sisters could carry themselves with pride for being a member of the Ducal House, so Lecter believed the tutor.

"For a Duke's daughter to call an unknown nobody the Master of the Brave, it is doing a disservice to high society for you to follow that young commoner boy. Our honour would be stained!"

"Unknown nobody... even if you're my father, for you to call Onii—my master that, I would never forgive you!"

Leticia was incensed at Lecter's words.

If the tutor had patiently taught Leticia slowly from the basics, in her studies, in her swordplay, in her martial arts, she may have awakened as the Brave faster.

However, it was with Wynn that she enjoyed reading books, learning magic, and moving her body.

In Leticia's isolated world, only one person gave an unwavering light.

Feeling Leticia's rage-filled gaze, Lecter flinched, but trying to keep up appearances as a father, he squeezed his voice out.

"Li-Listen, Leticia. You and this commoner boy you call "Master" live in completely different worlds. Are you willing to face the unhappiness of the surroundings not being able to accept it?"

"Not able to accept it?"

Leticia showed a faint smile.

"Why does it have to be recognized by somebody? Apart from me and Master, who else's opinion matters?"

"A-anyways, I will not allow you to join the campaign. Certainly, you were chosen as the Brave, and you have the status to be able to not bow down to the Emperor, but you are still my daughter. You have to obey the words of the head of Mavis House."

Lecter rung a bell on his work desk.

The Ducal House's attendants opened the door and filed into the room.

They held in their hands excessively decorated frames, with what appeared to be portraits.

A total of six attendants entered.

Each person carried five or six drawings, making a total of 30 to 40 paintings.

"These are all portraits of your marriage interview candidates.<sup>[2]</sup>"

"Marriage interview...!?"

Leticia's mind recalled the time when Cornelia showed her portraits of various young aristocrats a few days ago.

"Not only from our country, but even royalty and prominent families from neighboring countries. You can choose a suitor from any of these."

"Father. Why are we doing this? I do not wish to have a marriage interview. I have already dedicated my heart to somebody."

"Is that the commoner you call 'Master'?"

Leticia hung her head at Lecter's words

From her anger to her bashfulness, and seeing her completely flushed face, her attitude was fitting for her age, but Lecter merely scowled upon seeing her attitude.

"There is also the proposal from Prince Alfred that His Majesty mentioned. His Majesty is very enthusiastic about the idea. Rather than some foreign nobility, Prince Alfred should come first. Of course, you can decline if he doesn't interest you. It would normally be unacceptable to decline the Crown Prince after having the marriage interview, but your circumstances are special. At any rate, the Brave is an existence outside normal common sense.<sup>[3]</sup> The title of Brave is that important. I am proud of you as my daughter."

Lecter's gaze moved from Leticia to the attendants in the room.

"Leticia. You're a member of the Ducal House. Please be aware of the status you hold. You all keep watch and keep her from leaving."

"We will humbly obey, Master."

“You’re not thinking something stupid as trying to force your way out, right? For your sake, and for the sake of the commoner brat you call ‘Master’.”

“If you lay a hand on Onii-chan—!”

Leticia’s voice was once again filled with rage. However, Lecter didn’t flinch. He merely looked at Leticia with a grim face.

“Take them with you.”

With one sentence, Lecter looked down at the papers spread across his desk. His voice showed that it was final.

Leticia glared at Lecter, but at the urging of the attendants, she rose and left the room. In the doorway, she looked back for a moment, but Lecter paid her no heed, his expression showing that he wasn’t going to say any more.

‘What do I do, Onii-chan?’

If she used her power, nothing in this world could suppress Leticia.

However, apart from simple strength, Leticia was bound by the chains of her own status, as the Brave, and as the third daughter of the Duke.

More than the difference in status between Wynn and the nobles, Leticia and Wynn’s status were as different as night and day, just as Lecter had said.<sup>[4]</sup>

‘You and this commoner boy you call ‘Master’ live in completely different worlds. Are you willing to face the unhappiness of the surroundings not accepting it?’

She couldn’t respond to those words. Leticia’s status, which she had never desired, was a tall wall looming between Wynn and her.

She returned to her room, and looked out the window. She saw a single bird flying in the sky.

She wanted to throw away everything.

Her title as the Brave, and her status as a Duke’s daughter.

However, it was impossible.

Her exploits and achievements would be handed down for generations.

If Leticia desired, she could take Wynn and flee to another country. If she did that, she could leave behind the title of Brave and her status as lady of a Ducal House. Unlike any other noble lady, she believed she could live in any sort of environment.

But that would mean that Wynn would have to give up his dreams of becoming an imperial knight.

If Leticia begged him, that kind youth would accompany her. However, Wynn would end up abandoning his dreams. Leticia didn't want that.

Just like a bird which had once again lost its freedom, Leticia stared enviously at the birds flying freely in the sky.

#### Translator Notes

1. Expletive you レクトール... I was going to call you Lector, but considering your actions, I'll call you Lecter. I don't care if google comes up with Lecter being a last name. You deserve it. —back
2. omiai... I rage-quitted here for a long time... —back
3. Lawyer A will record this sentence against you for the trial. You have been notified. —back
4. Translator's liberty of idiom... —back

# Chapter 36: Preparing to Sortie

“Now then, you all. That attitude is good. Listen.”

Royce, accompanied by a tall knight, stood in front of Wynn and the others, and puffed his chest out, allowing his swollen belly to jiggle.

Wynn, Locke, Wedge, and Reeno, as his subordinates, saluted their superior. Royce nodded at them, and returned the salute, then began to speak.

“I am Royce, your superior. As you can see, my rank is Lieutenant. And this is Vice-captain Kelvin.”<sup>[1]</sup>

“Nice to meet you all.”

Lieutenant Kelvin, who was introduced as Royce’s adjutant, saluted.

Unlike Royce, christened Fat Bald Toad by Locke, who was grimacing, he was a man with delicate features, which gave a meek impression, and his fine eyes carried a light of intelligence.

“First, let’s make sure. You were assigned to this platoon for scouting and patrolling. We will go as a smaller group in front of the main forces to search for the enemy, and once we find them, report to the main army on the double. Since you’ve been assigned to this platoon, I assume you all have learned reconnaissance and stealth techniques at the Knight School?”

“Yes. We have been trained.”

Locke, acting as their representative, responded.

‘Rather, can you even scout, like that?’

That thought crossed Locke’s mind, but he didn’t say it.

“Alright. There is still some time before the army begins its march, so in that time—”

Royce glared at his subordinates who were lined up in front of him, and gave a big sigh.

“Well, you probably had not been notified of your assignment beforehand.

You three apprentice knights, metal armour will surely make a sound. It is important to be silent in a reconnaissance mission. Come to the equipment section and get the knight's leather armour. And that commoner there— no, Knight Cadet Wynn."

Royce frowned in displeasure.

"Change what you're wearing."

"Huh?"

Wynn reflexively looked down at his body. In the first place, he didn't have metal armour on, and was already wearing leather armour. Unlike the others, there shouldn't have been any problems with his attire, or so he thought.

"What is with that filthy appearance? Are you trying to sully the glory of the Remulshil Empire's Knight Order?"

He was wearing worn-out leather armour over a worn out shirt and trousers. Compared to the three students, who were wearing metal armour, or even Royce and Kelvin, who were already wearing the Knight's leather armour that was used for scouting, his appearance was conspicuously shabby.

The armour worn by seasoned veterans would get damaged. This was inevitable, and the scratches were badges of pride reflecting their experience.

However, the armour Wynn wore was so damaged, it was as if it had been salvaged from a battlefield somewhere.

"When we set off from the Imperial Capital, there will be many civilians who will behold our gallant figures. When they see your shitty-looking armour among the knights, it will shame the knight order. Follow the other three to the equipment division and get a new suit of armour. Ah, and you should also get a new sword. Don't get an old, used sword, but a brand-new one. Kelvin, lead them to the equipment division."

"Yes sir. But, what about the procedures?"

"When I saw the name of that commoner in the list of people assigned to me, I already took care of them. You should only have to tell them my name. I leave the rest to you. There's not much time until we set off. Hurry."

“Yes sir.”

In the end, the disdain never left Royce’s face, from the time he first faced them, to the time he walked away.

“My subordinates are all commoners, huh... I got the short end of the stick...”

Grumbling and muttering, he seemed to be walking to where the knights of the other scouting groups were.

“Okay okay, everybody. Listen up.”

Wynn and the others gaped at his receding figure, but were brought to their senses by a clapping sound.

Kelvin was full of smiles after Royce left. That man seemed completely divorced from the concept of a knight. He didn’t give off any hint of the strict, rigid rules associated with knighthood.

“First of all, as the Captain said, let’s go to get the equipment. Please follow me to the equipment division.”

“Uh, Um...”

Wynn called out timidly to Kelvin, who was about to lead them like a teacher leading children.

“Wynn-kun, is it? Did you have a question?”

“Yes, sir. Since I’m a Knight Cadet, I thought it was against the rules for me to get a knight’s sword.[2]”

“Ah, that.”

Kelvin nodded.

“There will be no problem. Rather than that, we are headed to a battlefield, where rules don’t exist. In order to survive, you need good equipment and a good deployment..... Well, we can’t choose where we’re deployed, but we should do as much as we can about the equipment and supplies.”

“Huh, I understand.[3]”

“Do you have any other questions? If you do, please ask.”

The four students exchanged glances, while Kelvin continued to smile at them.

“Anyways, to tell you the truth, since you guys have only experienced training missions, and since there haven’t been any live combat situations, I believe that you’ll experience various feelings, but try hard not to die. The first step is getting equipment.”

Kelvin addressed the group of four with a light tone as he led them to the equipment division.

“Umm... Is it okay that we don’t stand in line?”

There was a long line of people in front of the equipment division’s warehouse, all waiting to get spare equipment. Among them were also people wearing rusted armour and swords. Their impatience could be seen on their faces.

Reeno took a sidelong glance at the line, then timidly asked Kelvin, who continued to march forward.

Some of the knights glared at them for completely ignoring the line.

“There is no problem.”

Kelvin kept walking, ignoring the line.

Surprisingly, Kelvin had completely ignored even the Majors<sup>[4]</sup> in the line, who held a higher rank than him.

“...Sheesh, What are they doing? We’re about to sortie, and they still haven’t finished giving out equipment?”

“That’s right,” Kelvin agreed, when Wynn let out a murmur.

“Unlike the Knights from the front lines, the Knights who protect the Capital clearly have no sense of urgency. If enough of the knights had that sense of urgency, then the line would move more quickly. I wonder how many people of the upper echelons of the Knight Order have that sense of urgency?”

Despite the bustle around them, Kelvin’s words, which had digressed into a monologue, stuck in Wynn and the other’s ears.

“Did I make you nervous? Please relax. Even though our Captain, Lieutenant Royce, said things like getting assigned commoners is the short end of the stick, he still does his job well.”

Kelvin smirked at the Knights in the long queue who couldn’t conceal their irritation, and then turned to face the rookie knights who were his subordinates.

“It’s rather strange for rookie knights about to go to battle to be able to skip the line to get equipment. Is it really alright? It is critical to have proper equipment to survive. Those who don’t prepare their equipment will die first!”

“Hey, What do you think of Lieutenant Royce and Lieutenant Kelvin?”

“Well, I really like Lieutenant Kelvin.”

“Nobody asked you for your opinion, Reeno.”

Locke, who had asked the question, smiled bitterly.

They were being led to the equipment division, while completely disregarding the long queue.

Kelvin spoke Royce’s name, and surely enough, the clerk at the equipment division brought several bundles to Wynn and the others.

Each bundle had a wooden nameplate tied to it. Wynn’s bundle contained a brand new sword, and the standard-issue shirt and trousers made of a sturdy black cloth.

The gazes of the knights who were waiting in line were threatening upon seeing their clearly special treatment with the advance preparations.

Somehow, Kelvin had the nerve to ignore them, but the four students were petrified by nervousness, and hurriedly left after taking their bundles.

The four put on the brand new leather armour from their bundles, while whispering amongst themselves so as to not be heard by Kelvin, who was standing some ways away from them.

“Hmm, despite his appearance, it seems that Vice-captain Kelvin really does give off a knightly aura. But Captain Royce doesn’t at all.”

He<sup>[5]</sup> put his sword into his sword belt and looked at Kelvin, who was waiting for them to change.

“Honestly, I’m disappointed. Is he really only in his thirties? With that belly, does he really intend to fight?”

“What do you think, Wynn?”

Wynn, who was staring at the brand-new knight’s sword, looked up and thought about Locke’s question.

“Honestly, my first impression of Captain Royce was bad during our first meeting, but...”

He had spoken disdainfully of commoner knights. In addition to that, he was obese, despite being a knight. He was completely different from Wynn’s ideal knight.

From the time Wynn met him at the palace until now, Wynn’s impression of him was the worst.

However—

“Even though his outward appearance doesn’t give a good impression, I believe that he is, at least, a capable person.<sup>[6]</sup>”

Wynn’s gaze returned to the sword, which was polished to the point of glistening in the sunlight.

The grip, the blade, and the tip.

The whole thing fit Wynn perfectly.

When he drew the sword after receiving it, the blade had already been thoroughly sharpened.

It was the standard-issue knight’s sword<sup>[7]</sup>, mass-produced in large quantities, so it needed constant maintenance.

However, this sword was polished so much that there wouldn’t be a problem if he used it immediately.

When he infused it with magic as a test, magic runes gave off a pale glow.

Wynn did not have a good affinity with any of the practice swords he had wielded before.

Therefore—

He now wore a brand-new shirt and pants, and even brand-new leather armour.

The leather armour had already been adjusted to fit Wynn's body.

"Oh, that's right."

Reeno also looked down at her leather armour.

Her armour fit a smaller female build like hers. It fit her perfectly, as if it had been tailored to her.

Likewise, Wedge's armour also fit his tall body perfectly.

"So he might be good on the administrative side of things, huh?"

Locke also changed his appraisal of Royce.

To put him in the best light, Lieutenant Royce looked like a typical corrupt noble, but considering how he arranged for them to receive equipment and supplies, especially before setting out, despite the anger of those waiting at the equipment division, his administrative<sup>[8]</sup> capabilities definitely improved his evaluation.

Could it be, that when he received the names of his subordinates, he went to the Knight School to find out more about them?

The Knight School naturally had all sorts of information about the students, including their physical ability and grades.

Royce even circumvented regulations to give Wynn a knight's sword.

He was biased against commoners, but as a soldier, but he seemed to have a sense of justice that disregarded status.

Good weapons and good equipment would raise the chances that the whole group survived.<sup>[9]</sup>

Royce was a competent officer, for being able to understand this fact— at

least compared to the long line that included Lieutenants and Majors.

Despite his boorish outward appearance, Locke was amazed by his astuteness.

Most of all, Locke was happy to see his friend Wynn happily eyeing the sword he was given, so he raised his evaluation of Royce.

Even during that periodic subjugation mission, the sword Wynn used was just a loaner, since he was just a knight cadet.

However, for this mission, the knight's sword was actually given to Wynn, despite his status as a knight cadet. It was also a conciliatory gesture towards Wynn.

'After this, there will be nothing else to say about Lieutenant Royce's leadership abilities and personality.'

At least for now, he decided to trust in that surprising aptitude for command.

#### Translator Notes

1. These ranks are a mess that I will promise to fix after the arc is over, and I figure out what the big picture is. For now, Captain is just the title for a leader of a group. Lieutenant is the actual rank. Not sure if actual militaries work like that. —back
2. 騎士劍->Knightly sword, the most common sword in the middle ages or something. —back
3. paraphrased... —back
4. a rank above Lieutenant. Centurion would work if roman —back
5. either Wedge or Reeno(female)... —back
6. so forgiving... —back
7. This is apparently an actual type of sword. "The most common type of sword in the middle ages"—paraphrased from Wikipedia. ElephantNo5 dot(.) wordpress dot(.) com —back
8. Not my favorite word here... an adjective befitting an officer —back
9. Well, no traitors is a bit more important... —back

## Chapter 37: First Day

The army of 500 knights began its orderly march towards the Imperial Capital's arch.

The silvery armour gleamed as the morning sun rose above the silhouette of the mountains. At their waists hung the steel longswords, and on their backs were shields that were also made of steel.

The crest of the Imperial Knight Order, a double-headed lion, looked exactly as Wynn remembered seeing it in his childhood.

Even though Wynn wasn't wearing the shining silver armour, he did have the same two-headed lion emblem etched into the chest part of his leather armour, and was riding a horse, wearing a majestic mantle, with the rest of the departing knights.

The residents of the capital, in order to catch a glimpse of their gallant figures, were crowding the roadside, creating a loud stir.

Wynn saw his younger self in the children, who were enthusiastically watching the knights with gaping mouths from the crowd, and couldn't help smiling.

*'I guess that one day, those children will come knocking on the doors of the Knight School, just like I had.'*

Wynn's former self seemed to overlap with those of the children.<sup>[1]</sup>

Since the day that becoming a knight became his dream, he made good use of the spare time in his work to watch the knights as they set off.

In the beginning, he watched them alone, but eventually, Leticia could be seen standing beside him.

The pair snuck out of work, for which Hanna scolded them thoroughly.

*'Will these kids become even a little closer to the knights they admire?'*

Right now, though he could not call himself a knight, here he was.

Along the way, he could see the Wandering Bird's Roost inn. There was a crowd in front of the inn was, just like everywhere else.

It was the place where Wynn had set his eyes on becoming a knight and taken his first steps towards that goal..

He could see Randell and Mark.

They were leaning out of the window of the second floor.

Wynn couldn't see Hanna and Abel, but when he lightly raised his right hand, Randell and Mark gave him a big wave in return.

He was proud, but slightly embarrassed, at being seen by people he knew, but he straightened his back, puffed his chest out, and looked forward.

'I also wanted Leti to see this...'

In the end, Leticia was nowhere to be seen, even up to the start of the march from the Knight Order headquarters.

He was disappointed that he couldn't show Leticia this moment of triumph, but it was Leticia who believed more than anybody else that he could become a knight. She probably encountered some unavoidable situation.

She held the title of Brave, so by all rights, she should have a lot of work to do.

Anyways, Wynn wasn't even setting off as a full-fledged knight.

In that case, it wouldn't be too late to show his triumphant appearance by becoming a full-fledged knight by accomplishing meritorious deeds in this mission.

In order to do that, he had to come back alive.<sup>[2]</sup>

He couldn't rest on his laurels forever.

Wynn and the others, under Royce, would carry out reconnaissance.

They would scout out the enemy, one misstep could lead to the risk of being the first combatants. If he rested on his laurels, he would die before being able to do anything.

Wynn tightened his face, and sharpened his gaze.

“Congratulations, Onii-chan.”

There was, if one listened closely, an almost inaudible whisper.

Even Cornelia, who was standing beside her, almost couldn't hear it.

When she heard this, Cornelia felt her chest tightened slightly.

There stood Leticia, wearing a captivating smile that fascinated even Cornelia, who was of the same gender.

The two women were watching the knights march on the main street from a window in one of the rooms of the palace.

From that far away, the knights appeared to be no more than a mass of shining silver. Of course, they wouldn't normally be able to make out each individual person.

However, Wynn, the youth who had aspired to be one of those knights, was sure to be among them.

He still didn't have the status of a full-fledged knight, but he was participating in the mission as part of the Knight Order.

Who knew how much blood and sweat he had shed up to this point.

Apart from the things she heard from Wynn, Leticia, and also Locke, the three friends she had made at Knight School, Cornelia couldn't understand their circumstances.

Since, as a princess, her upbringing was without want, she it was hard for her to understand Wynn's circumstances.

He lost his parents. He also didn't have money.

He probably had to struggle with all his might in order to earn each day's food.

It must have been an immense ordeal.

To achieve his dreams, he worked diligently every day, saving up small wages and tips, denying himself from his desires, becoming the embodiment of thriftiness in order to save every coin, and eventually, he overcame the obstacles and came knocking on the doors of the Knight School.

However, as a commoner born with only a little magic power, he must have been pushed to the bottom many times.

He had probably felt like giving up countless times. There were probably days where he was tempted to give up on his dreams and return to the simple life of a commoner.

However, every time that feeling appeared, his determination didn't falter. He didn't give up, he didn't choose to turn back, he just earnestly kept moving forward, steadily moving forward without retreating, and now, knighthood was now within his reach.

A single tear dripped down the side of Leticia's smiling face.

Leticia had undoubtedly waited anxiously for this day.

In their four years together, Leticia was the one who watched the closest as Wynn worked diligently.

Ordained as the Brave, Leticia was given the task of slaying the Demon Lord. Then, they were separated for four years, the same amount of time they had spent together.

During the time they were separated, they probably felt as if half of themselves had been torn off.

However, even after Leticia set off for a distant land, Wynn continued to persevere, believing that she wouldn't give up.

Leticia even set off to defeat the Demon Lord, a feat that even humanity's heroes attempted and failed many times, to humanity's distress..

Leticia also believed that Wynn would always continue working hard to make his dream come true.

Wynn too, believed that Leticia was doing her best alone in a distant land..

It was the desire to live up to each other's trust, that they continued walking, even in times of distress.

Put simply, it was due to their "hard work."

However, the wall separating them wasn't something that could be overcome

with simply “hard work.”

Despite occasionally shedding tears, coughing up blood, gritting their teeth, the two of them surmounted these obstacles. All because each believed in the other.

It was an indescribable bond.

Still, it was a pure, amazing feeling.

First, Leticia defeated the Demon Lord, and now, Wynn worked to achieve his aspirations.

Cornelia was angry that Leticia couldn’t be there to witness Wynn at his moment of pride.

Leticia couldn’t be there to congratulate Wynn at his moment of triumph.

Yet Leticia smiled.

Cornelia looked at her smile, and realized that people could also smile like that for other people.

Leticia was unable to be by his side, but it was hard for her to just watch from afar.

That lone youth, Wynn, took a step forward alone.

Leticia was happy for him from the bottom of her heart, as if it were herself.

But they couldn’t stay like this forever. Leticia had come to that place, despite interrupting what was an important day for both of them.

“Leticia-san, it’s about time...”

Cornelia resolved herself, then called out to Leticia.

Leticia turned around.

She regretfully looked away from the Knight Order, which was receding in the distance.

Then, when she turned around to look at the other person in the room, the smile had already disappeared from her face.

There stood the frigid Leticia van Mavis, the Brave.

She let off an overpowering presence.

The other person in the room, a young man, began to speak.

“Brave Leticia-dono. We would like you to forgive the royalty’s fecklessness. We have had to make use of you, who will continue to do great things in the future.”

“No need, Your Highness. I was also helped by this matter. I am also using this marriage interview with Your Highness to my own benefit.”

“If you say so... Then let us enjoy ourselves a little bit. I have heard from my little sister that you have been sent many marriage proposals.”

“That is so. However, since I am using this talk with you majesty as a shield, it is rather vague.”

“Hahaha. You are using me as a shield, huh. The number of people in the Empire who could do something that outrageous can probably be counted on only one hand.”

The pleasant-sounding young man, who was the crown prince of the Remulshil Empire, Alfred Raul Lute Remulshil, smiled.

“Now then, Leticia-dono. I believe you have heard a little from Cornelia, but there are agitators in this country who are trying to stir up pointless fights. Will you lend us a hand, not as the Brave, but rather, as a noble of the Empire?”

In the ninth month of the imperial calendar 285, the Knight Order set off towards the Empire’s borderlands to subjugate the Petersian army disguised as bandits.

Among the five hundred knights under the command of General Feyl, the name Wynn Byrd would be recorded in history.

His life would be passed down for generations, together with the legend of Leticia the Brave, as the Master of the Brave. His legend would record this as the first campaign of the Hero Wynn.

Translator Notes

1. He projected himself as one of those kids or something, I think —back
2. Because people die when they are killed. My passive aggression against aggregators is put into this footnote. I should come up with impromptu phrases like this in the footnotes... But the one aggregator I know of doesn't include footnotes... so should I just make footnotes critical to reading?... OR just make them too funny to miss... Why is this so long? Will this even make it to the post? —back

## Chapter 38: Camp ①

“At any rate, for it to need not only Apprentice Knights but Knight Cadets, the Knight Order really has fallen low.”

“Truly. It’s all the fault of those fools who conspired with Zaunas, now we have too many problems. The Knight Orders of other countries must be laughing at us.”

“In the first place, it was a mistake to allow commoners to become knights. They let it get to their heads.”

If they continued marching at a good pace, the Imperial Knight Order’s advance party, which had departed from the capital, would reach the place where the Petersian knights disguised as bandits were causing problems the next day.

At sundown, the knights made camp at a clearing, and were greedily eating their provisions as a pot hung over a campfire.

The knights gossiped, slightly tipsy, since a little alcohol was permitted in order to raise morale, since there was a chance that a battle would occur the next day.

The more serious knights discussed the prospects of the battle with the Petersian army, while the others talked about wine, women, and also the outsiders among them: the Knight School students.

The victims of the knights who talked about the students were invariably the commoners like Wynn.

Since the knights sent on the advance party were largely of either nobles or knight status, they didn’t have good sentiments towards commoners, who were the made up most of the insurgents who worked with Zaunas during the coup d'état.

“The mood is somewhat bad, huh.”

Reeno frowned while adding firewood to the campfire.

“Is it my fault?”

As if it weren’t in plain sight, Wynn asked about the surrounding state of affairs. He had felt the stares. They weren’t merely stares of interest. There were stares that clearly contained contempt.

“No, it’s not only because of you, Wynn. We’re also being targeted by the words.”

Even though the Marine house held more influence than lower-class nobles, the fact that Locke was a commoner was enough for them to scorn him.

“I wonder, how much money did they have to save up to get the status of knight?”

“Cut it out! The can hear you, you know?”

“There’s no way they have that kind of money. They probably pooled their money together. Don’t forget. Those guys are apprentice knights, not real knights.”

“Well, if they stood there with spears, then all they’re good for is for filling up numbers.”

“Come to think of it, there is even a knight cadet who hasn’t even been promoted to apprentice knight. He’s even wearing the Knight Order’s crest!”

They were clearly speaking loudly to provoke the students.

“... Those people...”

Locke clenched his fists tightly and tried to stand up, but Wedge, who was also by the campfire, put a hand on his shoulders.

“Those guys are just trying to pick a fight.”

“... But, they were saying....”

“Wait a minute, what do you think about this, Wedge?”

It wasn’t Wedge who responded to Locke’s surprise, but Reeno.

Wynn was also looking at Wedge, wide-eyed.

He had never talked with him in Knight School, but since they were now in the

same group, he would at least listen to what Wedge had to say.

“There are superior officers among them. They are provocatively picking a fight with us, in order to trick us into getting punished for going against superiors. It’s best to ignore them.”

Saying only that, Wedge crossed his arms, closed his eyes, and made no more movements.

“When you speak, you have a surprisingly manly<sup>[1]</sup> voice.”

Dumbfounded, Locke stared at Wedge’s face, which was illuminated by the campfire.

He seemed like an enlightened priest, the way he was silent, and didn’t tremble even a bit.

“But I wonder, do those people not know that Wynn is the Master of that Leticia the Brave?”

“From what I can see, those who are from knight families and lower class nobles don’t. If that’s the case, then there are some people who must not recognize Wynn’s face, since his name wasn’t called.”

Locke felt that the Empire’s upper echelons were avoiding the fact that Wynn, who was born a commoner, had achieved something that raised his reputation. If they had recognized his deeds during the coup, there was no way that Wynn would remain a Knight Cadet.

“If it were me, I would be too scared of Leticia-sama to say such things.”

As the the Brave and a Duke’s daughter, Leticia’s words held a large influence even on powerful nobles, and weaker houses would not be able to sway that influence.

“Well, it’s not just Wynn. I feel like they are treating us uniformly, complaining about the fact that we are commoners.”

Some of them belonged to houses of lesser nobles which had less power than Locke’s family, the Marine House.

Though it was highly probable that they couldn’t find out Locke’s lineage just by looking at the people that were being scorned.

“Sheesh, how unlucky...”

Reeno, looking down, called the other three’s attention in a small voice.

One knight approached the group of four, getting tired of provoking them to no effect.

“Hey you four!”

His gait was unsteady. He was clearly drunk.

It seems that he had drank more than was permitted.

“Us REAL knights think that you commoner knights being here is a real pain in the ass. You got that?”

“What is this guy saying...?”

‘Before bullying us commoner knights, you *real* knights should follow the regulations!’

The four probably agreed with Locke’s soft retort and probably had the same thoughts.

“Because Zaunas and you commoner knights did such a stupid thing, we went through such pointless struggles, you know?”

Those words were preposterous. He must have drunk a lot.

His attendants were also quite drunk, and rather than trying to stop him, they were egging him on.

“In the end, you commoner knights will immediately run away when the enemy appears, right? Okay. The esteemed me, a real, full-fledged knight, will tell you guys what to do.”

The drunk knight drew his sword.

“W-wait a minute. It’s not a joke anymore if you draw your sword. Aren’t duels during a campaign against regulations?” Reeno asked, flustered.

“It’s just a lesson. You guys are students right? The esteemed me, your senior, will give you studious students a swordplay lesson, that’s what we’ll say.”

“Hey, don’t do it. You’ve drunk too much.”

Locke shook his head, appalled.

“What should we do? That’s technically a superior’s order, right? But if we follow it, it’s also bad.”

Reeno looked around for somebody to stop it, but all the knights were staring at them, and wouldn’t want to stop it. They were all agitated, since they could possibly encounter the enemy the next day. To those who weren’t already asleep, this must have seemed like a good way to kill time.

“Hey, what’s wrong? Stand up. I said that I would teach you a lesson.<sup>[2]</sup> Let’s start with this young lady here. How bout that?”

“... you drunkard. Cut it out.”

Reeno badmouthed the drunken knight under her breath.

Even if Reeno wasn’t a knight yet, she was proud of being an apprentice knight. She was offended by his insulting words.

The drunk knight and his attendants wore repulsive smirks. The knight brandished his sword.

Judging that they wouldn’t be able to avoid a fight, Wynn and the others stood up and drew their swords.

The tension increased between them.

Suddenly, they felt a fierce sword pressure, and the surroundings fell silent for a moment.

“Wha...what happened...”

Reeno’s whisper was heard in the surroundings.

“What are you doing?”

There stood Lieutenant Kelvin, smiling peacefully.

His calm voice was not particularly forceful. He wasn’t carrying a sword. He still seemed like he couldn’t harm a fly, but his whole body exerted an intense sword pressure.

“Haven’t you had a bit too much? You should be resting your body before the campaign tomorrow. It is your job to rest in preparation for a fight, and aren’t

the students already being taught by instructors?"

Nobody spoke up. Everybody there was overwhelmed by the pressure Kelvin, a mere lieutenant, exerted.

"If I wanted them to train daily, as their deputy officer<sup>[3]</sup>, I would do it. You have a higher rank than my subordinates. They can't refuse your invitation because of that."

Speaking calmly, Kelvin slowly walked in front of the drunk knight.

"Now then, is that fine with you?"

Kelvin still did was not wielding a sword.

However, despite being only in his twenties, Kelvin's calm demeanor gave off the impression of a seasoned warrior. The drunk knight and his attendants, seemingly sobered, froze in place.

The knights around them, who were watching the commotion while drinking, took over half a minute to get up.

Among them—

'Oh?'

Kelvin was intrigued.

Despite the fact that the full-fledged knights around them all showed disgraceful appearances, only Wynn's and Locke's expressions didn't change. They were still limber and on guard while all the other knight's bodies had stiffened.

Since Wynn and Locke had sparred with Leticia again and again, so their ability had rapidly improved. They experienced Leticia's extraordinary pressure countless times. They were not even agitated in the least bit.

"No... we... um... we didn't want to trouble you, Lieutenant..."

Where did all the energy from before go? The drunk knight backed away while stammering.

"Thank you, you drank quite a lot, didn't you? Would you like to stay in the detention barracks for a while?"

“No thank you. Wait...”

“Hey, go.”

“He hurriedly sobered up, and when he returned to where the other knights were, he looked their way and saw Kelvin shaking his head in resignation<sup>[4]</sup>”

“I thought they were noble-born, but they’re so recklessly violent. They don’t have the ability to be a knight.”

He said the latter part in a soft whisper, and let out a sigh.

“Sheesh, even though we depart for battle tomorrow, they’re so lively. We took great pains to let liven up the atmosphere, by having all the officers above the rank Lieutenant stay in a separate tent. I can understand that you are excited before a battle, but If if you can’t control your own emotions, you won’t be able to use your strength when you need it most.”

Speaking to nobody in particular, Kelvin nonchalantly walked to where Wynn and the others were.

Despite the commotion around them, they saluted to the Lieutenant.

Kelvin returned the salute, and straightened his back.

“Tomorrow, we will go ahead of the battalion as scouts. That’s why, Royce says to hurry up and take a rest. You got it? Don’t forget that resting when it is time to rest is also part of your duty.”

#### Translator Notes

1. not sure if I used the right sense of the word — back
2. Literally:teach you. I added the “a lesson”... but don’t take it idiomatically! (or do so... it still fits) — back
3. as in Kelvin is the vice-captain — back
4. yareyare-ness? — back

## Chapter 39: Camp ②

After five days, the Imperial Army's advance party of 500 knights arrived at the area where the enemy was reported to have appeared.

Much less than coming into contact with the enemy, they weren't even able to find any trace of them.

Rather, every time the small scouting platoon discovered traces of the enemy, when they rode their horses to the place, no trace of the enemy remained.

No matter how quickly they moved after receiving the scouts' reports, they never found anything. They repeated this day and night, but no matter how high the morale was and their zeal, weariness inevitably spread throughout the army.

Originally, the advance party was made up of knights taken from the Knight Order's main force. Compared to the main body, their morale was already a problem to begin with.

"...Hey, this time, signs were found to the east."

"Wasn't it to the west last time? What the heck are those scouts doing?"

"Could they have made some sort of mistake again?"

Each time a mobilization order was passed down, people started to complain.

However, they couldn't disobey the mobilization order.

Leaving the transportation corps to pack up their tents, they set off on horseback immediately. However, unsurprisingly, when they arrived at the location, there was no enemy army to be found, only what seemed to be traces of an army there.

They blamed the scouting unit who had discovered the traces, but since they did actually find traces of the enemy, the scouting unit sent a messenger back to the main unit to report their findings.

"...The army's tension has decreased significantly."

Royce and Kelvin were in their tent.

Kelvin had come back from inspecting the whole camp, while Royce pored over the papers strewn all over his simple work desk, not touching his food.

"It must have been hard for you to quell the commotion last night."

Kelvin shook his head, shrugging off Royce's words of appreciation, and set his sword on the wall of the tent.

"If the expeditions keep coming to nothing, it probably can't be helped."

As the war-weariness spread, the discipline within the army slackened.

No matter whether they set off day or night, it all ended in a miss, so they began grumbling in discontent, and the knights of noble or chevalier<sup>[1]</sup> status began to criticize the commoners again.

Within the army, they began bullying the weaker commoner students and knights, and quarrels broke out. Members of Royce's platoon were also involved in one such incident the previous night, but Kelvin, like before, had intervened.

"As you had feared, the morale has lowered. And their discontent becomes targeted at the weak link. The reason is the deep divide between the nobles and chevaliers, and the commoners."

"Especially since all of the officers of this advance party, from the Commander to us lieutenants, are not mainstream nobles. It's full of weak nobles with inflated egos. Well, I had expected this, but..."

Royce offered Kelvin a seat, then wiped the sweat on his forehead with a handkerchief while arranging the papers strewn all over his desk, and took out a small piece of crystal from his breast-pocket.

"Were you in the middle of a call?"

"It's fine. I just finished the call."

Magical Communication Crystals were crystals imbued with magic, then broken into two pieces. People who held the corresponding pieces would be able to speak to each other. It was a top secret item, but was also very expensive, so it wasn't widely circulated. Normally, only the commanders of

armies and the country's VIPs would be allowed to possess such tools.

"The negotiations went well. To the other party, this discussion must have been a windfall for them."

"I see. With this, You have obtained a trump card."

"I will use whatever I can use. It is natural to aim for their weaknesses."<sup>[2]</sup>

Royce took a sip from the cup of tea that Kelvin offered him, and then took a bite of the piece of bread that was his dinner, which had gone cold.

"This is unpalatable. Military rations aren't meant to taste good, but this is disgusting."

Grimacing, Royce soaked his rock-hard bread into his cold soup, then chewed into it.

Seated in front of him, Kelvin smiled bitterly, and ate a spoonful of his bowl of cold soup.

The soup was made of chicken and beans, but it was only lightly seasoned.

"It seems that the military supplies are being traded illicitly. There is no way that there aren't injustices in the current Capital."

It was also doubtful whether even the amount of rationed food met the army's standards.

Royce and Kelvin sat there, eating in silence, when suddenly, an angry shout was heard outside the tent. Yet another quarrel had probably broken out.

Kelvin was about to get up, but Royce held his hand up and stopped him.

He judged that, by where the sounds of the commotion were coming from, their subordinates were not involved.

Not long after, they recognized shouts from other lieutenants, and the uproar gradually subsided.

"Frankly, I am also against commoners becoming knights."

Royce muttered.

"Wars should be fought by us nobles and experienced knights, not by the

civilians. The people should just work and live happily with their families, spending their time in peace.”

“Are you referring to Knight Cadet Wynn?”

“I am truly happy that the populace admires knights so much. Likewise, he had always admired these knights... but commoners don’t need to be involved in killing people as knights do.”

Putting down the bowl of soup, Royce left the tent, and looked in the direction of his subordinates. Although campfires were lit all over the camp, Royce was unable to see the tents that his subordinates occupied.

He had checked on their tents a few times, and even though he had seen the surrounding knights grumbling in discontent, he had seen no such signs from his subordinates.

They must have endured so much abuse and backbiting from the other knights.

Even though the atmosphere was tense, Wynn and Locke still remained calm. Even at the point Kelvin was forced to step in and defuse the situation, they remained calm.

The other commoner knights and student knights reacted to the knights’ provocations, but since Wynn and Locke had survived battles against other humans in that coup d'état incident, it gave them more composure than the other rookie knights.

“I will end up using him. Even though he should be one of those who just live in peace, since he aspires to be a knight, I will use him.”

When he noticed Wynn’s name in his unit roster, Royce was struck with an idea. He then thought of a plan.

“It is inevitable if you want to achieve success.”

Royce responded to Kelvin with a cynical laugh.

“If the Brave finds out what I’m thinking, then I will be killed by her.”<sup>[3]</sup>

He recalled the time he met the girl who was the Brave in the palace.

Believing that Royce had unfairly picked a fight with Wynn, her wrath had erupted.

“Success, huh...Only when we manage to protect a country where its people live in happiness, will I consider it a success. That is why I will use all the pieces that are available to me.”

The Empire had not yet realized Wynn’s true value.

Rather, the empire’s nobles and chevaliers, who looked down on commoners, refused to accept his value.

The words the Brave, Leticia van Mavis, had said that day:

“I will return to my Master, Wynn Byrd’s side.” Anybody would be interested in the person who taught her both swordplay and magic.

The name that “Divine Sword Princess” Leticia van Mavis, who was recognized as the Brave of legends, was spread all over the continent by the ambassadors in attendance.

Unlike this country, they were enthusiastic about it.

A fraction of the prominent nobles who controlled the country disliked the fact that a commoner threatened their position, under-evaluated him and never publicized his name.

Despite clearly having played the most significant role during that coup d'état by anybody's reckoning, because of the precedent, and the emphasis on the Knight School's grades, he remained a Knight Cadet. The merit-based system had been twisted by that faction of nobles.

However, the other countries were different.

The name Wynn Bryd was well-known.

However, the people of other countries had no influence at all on the nobles of the Empire.

How would he be treated in those other countries? There would probably be nobody who didn't know of him.

Royce will make use of this fact.

Even if he faces the wrath of the Brave, Leticia van Mavis, in order to achieve success, as a noble who aimed to protect the peace of the people, it was Count Royce van Elstead's duty to carry it out.

#### Translator Notes

1. Credit to Solistia for suggesting the word! Think of it as an honorary noble status for the knight families — back
2. This seems really vague... I will have to edit it when I figure out what Royce is plotting — back
3. Royce has guts. And has atypical reasons for his opposition. I like him. A complex character... more complex than Wynn? Maybe... orz — back

# Chapter 40: Scouting

“So, how is it?”

The whole area was once the domain of a bandit group. The bandit chief asked his underling, who had climbed on a branch of a tall tree.

“There ain’t been anything big since they camped out here. ‘Been a few scouts who left, but they’re not back yet.”

They were about a hundred Rools from the clearing where the Knight Corps advance party camped. (AN: 1 Rool is about equal 1 meter) Despite the darkness of the forest at night, the knights were clearly visible in the light of the campfires.

The man who was observing the knights once worked as a hunter, and had the best eyesight among all of his goons.

‘I... didn’t think it would go this well.’

Without the cover of darkness, he wouldn’t have been able to observe safely from just a hundred rools away. In the daytime, a sharp-eyed person would have easily spotted him, and, in the worst case, he would be discovered by one of the reconnaissance units who were scouting the area.

‘Sheesh, if we didn’t know how they would move from the beginning, this wouldn’t have been an easy job.’

Relying on the moonlight, the chief looked down at the paper in his hands.

The paper contained orders dated two days ago and sported the Imperial Knight Order’s official seal. To be more precise, it was a duplicate. The real one should still be in the hands of one of General Feyl’s aides.

Rather, it would be a mistake to call that one the real one, because the orders in the chief’s hands were undoubtedly the orders from the main army, which departed two days after the advance party.

“Are there soldiers coming closer?”

"I don't see nothin'. Those scouts went da way you said dey would, Boss."

"I see. It seems that these orders are real."

All of the Knight Order's movements had been leaked.

He had heard that General Feyl had bribed a superior to obtain his position, and didn't have the ability befitting a general. He would not go against the main army, or rather the Knight Order Headquarters, and follow the orders he received to the letter.

They had monitored the advance party ever since it had set off, not once did the party's movements contradict its orders..

At first, the bandits were both terrified upon seeing the Knight Order's armed might, and angry at being treated as sacrificial pawns. However, since their lives were also forfeit if they disobeyed their instructions, they reluctantly started monitoring the Knight Order, but it was an easier job than they had thought, and they had more breathing room.

They had also become used to faking traces of their group.

At any rate, no matter where the Knight Order went, they would always be at a safe distance.

"Hey, Boss, are those guys really soldiers? Even da new guys could beat them to death."

"Even the sentries are asleep, or drinking. Haha, I can see them clearly 'cause of the fire."

"Boss, can we attack them now?"

Hearing the report from the man on the branch, the other goons who were with the chief began to clamor.

"You buffoons! All we have to do is follow their orders! Is there any need to go out of our way to do more than what we are being paid for!? Life is precious! [1]"

"... That's right, ain't it, Boss?"

However, they couldn't be criticized for thinking like that upon seeing how lax

the Imperial Knights were.

‘If there were even more troops...’

The Imperial army had too many troops for mere bandits like them.

“Anyway, do it as we were told to. If we invite them as we were ordered, it should be fine.”

“...Can we really trust them?”<sup>[2]</sup>

“Whether or not we trust them, we can’t go disobey them.”

The chief answered while laughing cynically.

Even though they were ordered to do as they were told, those people probably didn’t even completely trust bandits like them. If the situation took a turn for the worst, they would definitely slaughter the whole bandit group, including the chief and his subordinates. There was only that level of trust between them.

Either way, they could only act as they were told to. There were no other alternatives right now.

“If anything changes, let me know immediately.”

They were currently entrusted with reporting the condition of the Imperial Knight Order. As far as reporting their movements, their job was going smoothly.

‘That bastard better give me wine and women once we finish.’<sup>[3]</sup>

“Did you say sumthin, Boss?”

“I didn’t say anythin’.”

“Oh, methinks one of the knight groups that went scouting just came back.”

Acknowledging his underling’s response, the chief plopped down on the root of the tree that his underling had climbed. If they came here, he would have to be prepared.

They couldn’t be considered negligent, but the laxity of the Imperial Knights was anti-climactic.

That was why the sentries had also overlooked them.

A reconnaissance squad had just returned, and appeared to be headed towards the advance party's headquarters to report in. Leaving the captain behind, they took a strange path towards the camp, as if trying to avoid the other squadrons.

There were six people in the platoon, in accordance with Imperial Knight Order regulations, but they hadn't noticed that one more person had joined them.<sup>[4]</sup>

"Shelter commoners?"

"Yes. She seems to be a survivor of a village that was raided. We found her wandering in the forest, and took her in."

"Don't just do as you please... Even if we leave her in the back, there is still a possibility a battle will occur tomorrow. We can't sacrifice war potential for the likes of a commoner."

"There must be another way, apart from taking her with us to battle. Luckily, we can make use of their experience."

"Put simply, if something happens, do you think you will get away with just a demotion, Lieutenant Royce?"

"...Am I prepared to even be discharged and stripped of my knighthood, is it?"

Feyl made a sour expression.<sup>[5]</sup>

"Fine. Taking care of the commoner will be your job."

"Well, I don't believe that there will be any knights stupid enough to lay their hands on the girl, but we will protect her carefully."

Royce merely kept up a serious countenance and saluted. He then left the tent that served as the headquarters, his bloated belly jiggling as he walked.

Feyl saw him off with a contemptuous glare.

"To speak like that in front of you, Sir... how disrespectful."

One of the aides beside him muttered.

“...The holdovers from Zaunas’s faction must be thrilled.”

“General Royce... oh, he is now Lieutenant Royce. He is a threat. He didn’t take part in the coup, but why wasn’t he discharged from the army?”

“He is a threat, and that is why he can’t be left to his own devices. We are monitoring him from within the Knight Order. That is my plan.”

Feyl answered his subordinate’s question.

“If we discharge him, he will return to his own territory. There, we won’t know what he is planning.”

“I see.”

‘Of course, it would be fine if he returns to his Countdom.’

Feyl sipped the high class wine that was allotted to the high-ranking officers.

‘Why should a great Marquis like me be afraid of a poor, debt-ridden Count? He didn’t participate in the coup, but if we find a pretext to crush him, that would be good. With his bad reputation, he wouldn’t have any allies if he tried to gather an army. He doesn’t even have the money to hire mercenaries. He can’t do anything.’

“Whatever. Having commoners mixed in would hinder our military operations anyways. From now on, his squad will be stationed at the rear, even during battle. With that, they will lose out on military accomplishments. We don’t have to mention that they were protecting commoners. We just have to report that Royce’s squad moved on their own, and hindered the army’s operations. We can even give the higher-ups a recommendation that Royce be demoted.”

His aides saluted, and then promptly went to summon their subordinates. Feyl watched them, then looked down at the documents in his hands.

Feyl had finally become a general after he turned fifty. On the other hand, Royce had become a general at the age of 30.

He feared that Royce would borrow more money to pay his debts and buy status. Feyl himself came from a Viscount family, and accumulated large sums of money to obtain the rank of General.

He was envious of the fact that Royce became promoted to the same level as

he did at a younger age.

They had met several times during strategy meetings, but each time, Feyl felt that Royce looked at him as if he were a mere peasant.

‘He has always looked down on me. Look on, as I rob you of even your rank of Lieutenant.’

Smiling darkly, Feyl continued to sip his wine.

“Well, they probably assigned us to the back for that sort of reason.”

Royce met with his deputy, Kelvin, walking towards the tents exclusively for squad captains.

“Feyl doesn’t want me to gain any achievements, so he stationed us in the back under the pretext of protecting the commoners.”

“Our trump card is this way. Should we ignore the orders and go to the front?”

“The person himself probably doesn’t want to fight. I would also like to avoid it if I could. From the intel, the Empire has the advantage in numbers. It’s fine for us to watch the developments from a safe place.”

“...I also pity General Feyl.”

Contrary to his words, Kelvin was smiling mirthfully. Royce scratched his bald forehead, and sat his heavy body into a chair.

‘I really am worn out.’

Royce had been preparing countermeasures for several days.

Royce received no communications from General Feyl and his Aides, apart from the dispatch orders sent to all the scouts. Royce was not even summoned to the strategy meetings.

His tent was in the same place as the other officers of the advance party, but apart from that, he was clearly being ostracized.

Thanks to that, he was able to do his work well, so it wasn’t that bad.

‘Did my weight go down slightly? I miss seasoned food.’<sup>[6]</sup>

Looking down at his rotund, fleshy, stomach, Royce went over the plans he had been setting into motion the past few days.

*A short time before.*

A short while after setting off on horseback, the reconnaissance squadron led by Royce.

Royce had given the signal to rest, then stopped his horse. His subordinates then dismounted and gathered at the place he had indicated.

“Now then, it seems that there is a traitor among the top brass.”

Royce announced that to his squad members with a grave expression, completely unlike Kelvin’s smiling face.

At those words, Wynn frowned, and Locke sighed. Reeno and Wedge exchanged glances.

“Well, I had kind of felt like that was the case, but why do you think so, Captain?”

“There is somebody, either from the Petersian army itself, or somebody they paid off, planting the remains of the camps and the hoofprints, manipulating the actions of the scouts. Judging by how well they know the terrain, it’s probably a local they hired.”

Perhaps it was for the sake of the squad members. Acting as their representative, Kelvin asked Royce a question. Royce stroked his plump, oily chin, took out the jerky that was part of their rations and started eating it.

“But from Abel’s story, they are about 200 men strong. I don’t think they have enough people available to carry out these small tasks.”

“Did reinforcements come from Petersia?”

“That shouldn’t be the case. The Petersian border should be strictly guarded. If they really invaded, we would have heard of it long ago.”

“That’s right. They would’ve been caught then.”

Royce nodded at Wynn, Reeno and Locke’s appraisal.

“I believe that there are people within the Knight Order who are guiding

them, probably a noble. I also believe that their collaborator is from a territory near the border. Two hundred men, but there doesn't seem to be supply unit. I thought that they were obtaining supplies from the previously attacked villages, but none of the villages seem to be pillaged. From this, it is clear that there is somebody supporting them."

"In the region near the border, there are four fiefs: the Valessia Countdom, Rembrandt Marquisate..."

Locke named the nobles who governed the territories in the area, while looking at Royce's face.

"Next is... the Elstead Countdom, and the Cliffdorf Marquisate. That's all of them."

Wynn continued where Locke left off.

"That's right. Right now, among the four nobles Locke listed, Lord Valessia and Lord Rembrandt are not related to the military. They are both advance in age and close to retirement. The Houses who are related to the military are the Elsteads and the Cliffdorfs."

"...Is there any evidence?"

Hearing the accusation, Reeno timidly offered a question.

"What I just said was just my intuition."

"Excuse me, Captain. It may be conjecture, but you are still one of the suspicious people."

"As a Lieutenant, what I can do is limited. Of course, it is still possible that I am guiding the Petersian army to impede the progress of the Knight Order. You can only believe in the fact that I didn't need to tell you anything if that were true."

"I guess that's right."

Wynn nodded.

"Either way, the army is probably playing into the hands of the enemy. I apologize for involving you in a lost cause. That is why, I will play a few tricks of my own."

Royce grinned at his squad members, who were at attention.

When they saw that smile, everyone thought: 'Whoah, he must be plotting something bad...'

"Sheesh. I didn't think that I would be doing the same things as I did as an adventurer once I entered the Knight Order."

"I also thought so."

"Speaking of, you two are quite used to these movements, huh?"

"...I had spent time working in the Adventurer's Guild."

"After spending time with Wynn, you eventually end up like that..."

Locke responded to Kelvin, who was walking behind him, with a dry smile.

In order to carry out Royce's trick, Vice-Captain Kelvin was in charge of Locke and Wynn as they made their way through a forest a ways from the highway.

Naturally, they had to make their way through the forest trails, so they had to dismount from their horses and make their way on foot.

The training for the Knight Order had included practice travelling in the wilderness. Searching for monsters in the Periodic Subjugation Mission also required them to make their way through the forest.

Wynn led the way.

Occasionally consulting the map for directions, he cleared away the obstacles as he moved.

"Vice-captain Kelvin, do you have experience moving through the wilderness?"

"I am ashamed to admit that I don't have much experience. At most, I have gone on monster subjugation missions two or three times."

"I see. Locke and the Vice-captain, you both should watch your step. You can watch out for bugs, leeches and wet grass, but you should also watch for mud and branches."

"It would be helpful if bugs didn't approach."

“As expected of the only person who has worked in the Adventurer’s Guild.”

“It’s because I was taught various things since I was young... it would be good if everyone is quiet.”

Wynn’s pace dropped as he spoke.

He expertly cleared away the branches, and pointed out the spots with solid footing to Locke and Kelvin, who were following him, as he went.

Wynn instantly made an insect repellent salve. The insects could carry frightening diseases from monsters and beasts that hid in the thickets.

It was possible to cure the diseases with magic, but they were currently going ahead alone, so there were no field medics who could use healing magic near them. Wynn’s experience as an adventurer surpassed Kelvin’s expectations.

It had been a while since they had set off that morning, and the sun was already high in the sky. Wynn, who was more experienced within the forest, asked Kelvin’s permission to take a break for lunch.

It was hard to see in the thick forest, yet Wynn noticed something moving in a thicket off to the right.

‘A monster? Or is it an animal?’

Wynn stopped walking, soundlessly signalling to Locke and Kelvin to be wary of what was ahead.

‘Since we entered the forest, I had felt a few gazes watching us, but...’

There was still some distance between the Wynn and the rustling. He didn’t know whether it was coming closer, but he was lucky to have noticed it.

‘What should we do?’

Wynn turned towards Kelvin, seeking his direction. Kelvin, as the Vice-Captain, was the one who had the authority to make decisions. Kelvin nodded, and drew closer to Wynn.

“Do you know what is approaching us?”

“No, but I know that it is headed straight for us. We could hide and let it go past us, but if it’s an animal, our scent will stand out.”

"Hmm... I would like to avoid battling an unknown number of opponents, but it doesn't seem like there are any alternatives if it's moving towards us."

As softly as he could, Wynn drew his sword.

He hadn't yet channelled magic power.

If it were a monster, they would be able to sense his magic.

Wynn had just enough magic power to imbue the sword with it, but he didn't want the approaching creature to sense him.

Kelvin and Locke also drew their swords.

They both didn't bring their shields along because they were moving through the forest, they held their swords with both hands as Wynn did.

Since it was impossible to swing the sword with all the trees in the way, Wynn assumed a thrusting stance.

Wynn would strike first. Locke and Kelvin supported him, just in case there were multiple targets, so that Wynn could have time to pull his sword out.

Then, the creature jumped out of the thicket —

"A Goblin!?"

It was a devil-type monster. Smaller than a human, it possessed the intelligence to use tools and weapons. It wasn't too hard to defeat if one had the experience, especially if they were prepared, like Wynn and the others were.

The goblin had jumped out, paused for a moment when it saw the humans, and let out a strange cry, leaping at them.

However, its straightforward movement exposed many openings.

Wynn rushed forward and used his sword to stab at the goblin, who wielded a rusty hatchet. The tip of the sword impaled the goblin in the middle of its chest.

"Are you alright, Wynn?"

Locke called out to him as he came closer.

"Yeah. It was easier since the goblin charged out forcefully. However, you

shouldn't let your guard down. It didn't even flee after seeing us."

"Eh, this goblin was clearly running away from something else."

"What could it be...?"

"Something is approaching fast!"

Just as Wynn was about to pull his sword out of the goblin, he leapt backwards.

An arrow appeared right where Wynn was standing moments ago. It was aimed at Wynn's feet.

"This isn't what we were told, isn't it... Captain?"

Kelvin muttered, letting his sword drop to the ground.

"...That's right..."

Locke also dropped his weapon and held his hands up, while Wynn raised the hand that was holding the dagger. They glared at the direction the arrow came from.

Atop the branch of a large tree, looking down at them with bows drawn, were the rulers of the deep forest— the elves.

1 Rill	1 millimeter
1 Chel	1 centimeter
1 Rool	1 meter
1 Kerl	1 kilometer

(TN: I made the table so it's abit more organized)

### Translator Notes

1. raw: 命あっての物種 is an idiom saying something like "Life is the most important priority in one's life", or something like that... — back
2. talking about the people who gave them their orders. — back
3. this guy's gonna die. — back
4. section under review. It may change when we figure out what's happening... — back
5. idiom: as if he had bitten a bug. — back

6. alternate TL: I miss my wives' food. With plural wife. I don't think the guy has a harem, but just putting it out there... — back

# Chapter 41: Elven Village ①

They were deep within the forest, where it was impossible to reach on horseback.

The trunks of the surrounding trees were so wide that an adult could reach around the tree, and his hands would barely touch. The overgrown leaves blocked the sunlight.

It was a world far removed from humanity, a ravine filled with lush greenery.

Its inhabitants, the elves, ruled the forest. Compared to humans, they were blessed with abundant magic power, longevity, and a highly-developed civilization.

The elves' distinguishing characteristic were their elongated ears, crystal blue eyes, and alabaster skin. Their slender-looking bodies belied their supple muscles. The hundreds of years of experience accumulated over hundreds of years of their life far surpassed that of humans.

Their capital lied at the center of the Alfana Continent, at the roots of the World Tree that towered over the continent.

From the reports of the few humans that were permitted to enter the capital, they praised its splendor and magnificence as rivalling that of Dragonkind, one of the strongest races of the land.

The dragons were one of the reasons that the Demon Lord, who was feared by even Gods/Spirits, could not dominate the entire continent with his demons and subordinate monsters.

Humans of every nation made it a principle not to interfere with the Elven domain deep within the forest at the center of the continent. Likewise, the elves, with the exception of the eccentric individuals who did take interest in it, would not recklessly interfere with the world outside their forest.

“...Vice-Captain. what should we do now?”

“I wonder...”

Kelvin took a glance at the elves surrounding them. There was no opportunity to use magic. Any suspicious movements and they would immediately be turned into pincushions.

The second time they had taken a break after entering the forest, Wynn had reported to Kelvin that he felt like they were being watched.

Kelvin heeded Wynn’s warning, and was beginning to think that it was because of some monster observing them, so the three were being careful, but

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“I didn’t think that the source of those gazes would be the elves.”

“No matter how you look at it, they clearly don’t look friendly to me...”

Locke had a cramped smile.

“I heard that the elves didn’t really bother themselves with the human world.”

“Likewise, I didn’t think that I would receive such a welcome from these elves. I have never heard of human knights being surrounded like this.”

Their next course of action was dependent on the elves’ response.

*“Freeze! Don’t take another step!”*

The elven man who had shot an arrow at Wynn’s feet shouted at them in Elvish.

The elven language was a required subject in the Knight Academy<sup>[1]</sup>, since the elves were one of the prominent races on the continent.

Kelvin stopped walking, obeying the elf’s command.

Wynn scanned the surroundings.

Five elves were in plain sight, but there could be more than that.

*“We are from the Knight Order of Remulshil Empire. Lieutenant Royce, also known as Count Elstead, should have notified you that we would be contacting you, no?”*

*“I have not heard anything like that.”*

"How strange... We had arranged to meet with them."

Kelvin muttered, perplexed.

*"Drop your weapons. We'll detain you for the time being. We'll hear you out in our village!"*

The elf who spoke with Kelvin, raised his hand. A few of the elves who had their bows aimed at them stepped forward, collecting the sword that was still impaled in the goblin and the weapons Locke and Kelvin had dropped.

Then, they compelled the three to follow them.

"I wonder what they plan to do to us?"

"They don't seem to intend to hurt us, though."

They weren't tied up, but a short spear was held to their backs. It was probably because it would be hard for them to walk in the forest if they were tied up.

Wynn gently stroked the dagger at his waist. Their swords and short spears were taken from them, but they were allowed to keep their daggers and knives.

Since they were not restrained, they could defend themselves against monsters or animals that approached them.

"It seems like they are going to take us to their village. That was our destination in the first place. In a way, aren't we being escorted to their village? Just relax."

From the start, Kelvin seemed like he wanted to have the elves fight if they were attacked by something. His face still wore the same carefree smile as always.

In the first place, the elves only pointed their weapons at the three, and didn't do anything else. Of course, if they saw any signs of opposition, it wouldn't end there.

"Well, we can't really do much in this situation. Let's just obediently do what they say."

Wynn and Locke exchanged questioning glances, but Kelvin was right. They

couldn't do anything right now.

It was better for them to do as they were told. As he walked, Wynn searched for the elf who seemed to be the leader of the group.

He was the one who had caused such an abnormally menacing atmosphere.

If Captain Royce's message regarding them didn't reach the elves, then Wynn and the others would be treated as dangerous intruders.

He could understand why they were extremely on edge.

However, the leader elf's gaze contained a sort of dark gleam. Rather than mere caution, his eyes contained another emotion. Wynn felt like he wanted to cut them down at a moment's notice.

The other elves also appeared to feel the abnormal hostility coming from their leader. They seemed anxious as they walked.

That might have been why Kelvin had spoken in such a lighthearted manner.

Due to the tension, the group walked through the forest in silence. Silently, they made their way towards the elven settlement.

"Whoa....."

"How... wonderful..."

The settlement was about as large as a village, which was a modest size for one of the prominent races on the continent, but the splendid scenery made up for what it lacked in size.

A gigantic tree that gave off a pale glow towered over them in the center of the village.

Despite the surrounding trees blocking the sunlight, the giant tree's soft glow illuminated the whole village. On its branches, pools of water from the mountain stream reflected the tree's glow, creating a truly fantastical scene.

"Hey, Locke. I know that Leticia went on an arduous journey as the Brave. But I'm also kind of envious of her. As she travelled around the world, she probably saw many different things and met many different people... I know it was hard, but I still envy her. The world truly is wide."

“...Is that so...?”

Wynn couldn’t help but stop in his tracks as he tried to take in the view.

Since the elves’ own village was being praised, they didn’t rush their captives, but waited for them instead.

“Is that large glowing tree the World Tree?”

“No, it’s actually a sapling of the World Tree. Underground, the World Tree’s roots span the entire continent. New saplings are born from those roots. I heard that the elves made their capital and their other settlements from these saplings. Nevertheless, I never thought that even the sapling would be this beautiful.”

The three people stopped speaking for a while as they admired the scenery.

“If this is just a sapling, then how beautiful would the real World Tree be...? I would like to see it myself one day...”

*“Alright, that’s enough. Get moving.”*

The elves started to urge them to resume walking towards the village.

As they got closer to the center of the village, they could see the sapling more clearly.

“Those drops of light are glowing?”

As they approached, it became clear that the tree itself wasn’t glowing, but droplets that were gushing from the tree were giving off a soft glow. These droplets were the source of the tree’s glow when seen at a distance.

Wynn was so enthralled by the scenery that he had forgotten that he was under escort.

*“Enter.”*

The three were brought to the one stone building among all the wooden buildings in the elven community.

It must have served as a holding cell.

This time, all of their weapons were taken, and they were locked up in the cell.

“...Now what do we do?”

Locke struck the cell’s stone wall. It was a sturdy building.

The building’s two windows allowed light and air into the cell. A head could almost fit through the cell’s windows. The sole entrance to the cell was locked tightly from the outside.

“It’s pretty much impossible to escape from here.”

“...I wonder if they will give us food...”

Wynn rubbed his grumbling stomach. The bag filled with rations was confiscated along with their weapons.

“...It’ll be pretty bad without food, huh? That aside, have you felt any magic power, Vice-Captain?”

“Nope. It’s been completely sealed. It’s similar to the Empire’s Magic Sealing Barrier. The magic formation is probably also different, using elven magic.”

“Eh? I didn’t feel anything...”

“Well, you barely have any magic, Wynn. It’s not surprising that you didn’t feel anything.”

“The Empire’s Magic Sealing Barrier uses six towers surrounding the capital, and the tower in the capital. The seven towers are activated by a magic formation that amplifies magic. I can’t see anything like that here. Locke-kun, when did you notice that magic was being disrupted?”

“I noticed my magic being sealed when we entered the cell.”

“That was the same for me. That means that the magic sealing spell only affects this building.”

“Are magic sealing spells really that hard to create?”

“They are. I happen to know a bit about magic that prevents the casting of spells and magic that seals magic power of specific targets. However, it is really difficult to create a spell that affects only a certain area, and affects any number of people. Only a handful of people— rather, only people on the level of the Brave, the Great Sage, or the Saintess would be able to use it, but as far as I

know, but I haven't heard of anybody else apart from them."

"It really is hard, huh...?"

Kelvin nodded in agreement.

"That's right. You know that any sort of enhancement magic will have a lower effectiveness when cast on somebody else other than yourself, right? One's own magic is thought to resist the effects of other people's magic. It is the same with magic sealing spells. Back then, each person's magic was sealed, but that would require an enormous amount of magic to suppress our magic. An average human magician would have to use all their effort just to weaken their target's magic power."[\[2\]](#)

"But I feel our like magic has been completely sealed here."

"Yes. It is as Locke says. Just like it was during Zaunas's coup, our magic has been completely sealed."

"So elves have that much magic, huh..."

"Elves do have more magic power than humans, but they don't have enough magic power to seal any number of people within a certain area as it is here. I fear that the World Tree sapling is supplying the magic power for this."

Wynn took a peek out the window.

He could see the radiant tree from where he was.

"Are those lights actually magic power being emitted from the World Tree?"

He recalled that when Leti became serious, she also emitted a golden glow as magic power flowed from her body. A single person was able to create the same phenomenon as the World Tree. Once again, he was reminded that Leti, the Brave, was extraordinary.

"We have neither weapons nor magic. Nor do we have any food, so it looks like all we can do is sleep."

Locke laid down on the floor. There wasn't any furniture in the room. As for a blanket—

"This seems like a decent blanket... hm?"

Kelvin walked halfway to what seemed like a pile of blankets in the corner of the room, then stopped.

“What is it, Vice-Captain?”

“Um, did anything move just now?”

Wynn walked beside Kelvin, and his eyes also widened. The blanket was moving up and down, ever so slightly.

Kelvin and Wynn looked at each other. Locke prudently got up without making a sound.

Wynn quietly snuck up to the pile of blankets. He looked towards Kelvin and Locke, and they nodded. He pulled back the blankets, and grabbed the wrist of the person under there.

‘Huh? It’s thinner than I thought...?’

A slender arm.

“———! No... let go... Please, don’t kill me...”

They heard a feeble sob.

“Huh? A girl?”

The girl hidden under the blankets trembled, sobbing in terror as she looked up at Wynn.

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### Translator Notes

1. why did I ever use Knight School? I’m gonna change that sometime — [back](#)
2. I hear that a part of this explanation is key to the plot... — [back](#)

## Chapter 42: Elven Village ②

“Please... don’t kill me... I’m begging you...”

The little girl cowered while sobbing in a weak voice.

Bewildered, Wynn turned towards Kelvin and Locke.

But they also seemed dumbfounded.

“...it hurts”

“Ah, So-sorry!”

Wynn realized that he was tightly clutching her right wrist, so he hastily let go of her wrist.

While rubbing her right wrist, the girl curled up tighter, as if to conceal her body.

“Umm, I’m very sorry. I didn’t mean to hurt you, uh, hey, I won’t do anything.”

With a stiff smile, he held his hands out and took a step backwards to show that he meant no harm.

Not expecting it to be a girl, Wynn’s heart was also pounding furiously.

“Your words... Are you... from the empire?”

Still crouching, she looked up at Wynn’s face. Her face still showed signs of trepidation.

“Umm...”

Wynn once again looked towards Kelvin.

Kelvin nodded in affirmation, and Wynn knelt down to meet the little girl’s eyes.

The little girl wore simple clothes, and tied around her head was a light-colored kerchief, acting like a scarf. Her clothes were somewhat dirty, but they

weren't dishevelled.

Although they were covered in tears, the girl's large eyes were beautiful. She appeared to be around Wynn's age. Her eyes were slightly swollen from crying, but she had an attractive face.

"We are from the Imperial Knight Order. I am Knight Cadet Wynn. That is the person in charge of our unit, Lieutenant Kelvin. And that is Apprentice Knight Locke. What is your name?"

"Sherry... Sherry Torc."

"Sherry, is it? I'm sorry for scaring you. Is your wrist alright?"

Sherry nodded in response to Wynn's question. Her kerchief, which was shifted when the blankets were pulled off of her, came untied and fell off when she nodded.

"Ah..."

"Your ears..."

The ears were longer than a human's ears.

"No! Don't look!"

Sherry shut her eyes tightly and covered her ears.

"A half-elf, huh?"

Her eyes were a dark brown. All elves had blue or light blue eyes. There were no elves with dark brown eyes.

Sherry curled up and began to tremble when Wynn said the words "Half-elf".

"It's alright, don't worry."

The three knights waited for Sherry to calm down. In any case, they couldn't do anything else, and there was plenty of time.

After waiting a while for her to calm down, she eventually stopped trembling.

"Are you from Torc Village? Could you tell us what happened?"

Sherry timidly raised her head. Tears once again started to fall from her eyes. However, she was calmer than before.

She began telling them of how Torc village was attacked, and of the tragedy that happened that day.

“Hey, Rosefeld. Hey!”[\[1\]](#)

“What is it?”

“Is it fine to lock up the Imperial Knights there? If we end up clashing with the Empire, what will we do?”

“How would I know! Tell that to the elders!”

Rosefeld, the leader elf, spat out those words.

With an expression of disgust, he walked quickly as if to get away from the stone building where the humans were being held as quickly as he could.

Rosefeld’s feelings became stronger when he saw the girl who was already being held in that building.

It was hidden by the scarf on her head, but he could tell what she was from her distinctive magic power.

A Half-elf— or as the elders would say, a Tainted One.

The elves lived in the forest, but that didn’t mean that they spent all their lives in their communities. When they went out to hunt or forage, they would sometimes end up pretty close to human settlements.

Some of them ended up leaving the elven commune, yearning for the humans’ towns.

That was fine.

The news about the human world that they brought back was important.

But some people kidnapped the elves that wandered in the outside world.

Many elves were flawlessly beautiful.

That was because elves were closer to the divine than humans were. The ruling tribe of elves were High Elves.

That beauty would stimulate the lust of the humans, so elves were sometimes treated as sexual commodities. As a result, some of the captured female elves would give birth to unwanted children.

The result of a union between a human and elf would be a Half-elf.

The elves couldn't tolerate their existence, since they were a mark of humiliation.

*"Shit! I just can't accept it..."*

***"Be it a debt we owe, or a retribution to be had, always settle one's scores with others."***

That was the Elven Law.

That was why Rosefeld couldn't hold back his irritation.

Due to the Elders' old-fashioned thinking, they would repay kindness with hostility.

Rosefeld walked straight to the largest building in the village, where the Elders were, while recalling the day he had met with the elders. He thought of his brothers-in-arms from the past—

*"Shit! Resist it! If we fall here, this front will crumble. The pride of us elves are at stake!"*

Rosefeld cut down the spider monsters that were leaping at him.

*'There's too many of them!'*

He gasped for air as he looked around him.

His comrades had numbered almost a hundred, but only a third of them were left. Moreover, none of them, including Rosefeld, were unscathed.

It was a dismal situation.

Quite a long time had passed since the battle started. Elves had more magic power than the other races, but even that had its limits.

Rosefeld's own magic power and stamina were already rock-bottom.

All of the other elves lined up with him were also breathing heavily.

Their enemy, spider-shaped monsters the size of a cow, had slowly cornered the now injured elves with their reckless leaps, and were closing in.

All the fatigue that he had ignored in the heat of battle came crashing down

upon him as he rested.

The exhaustion he felt made it feel like his arms and legs were made of lead.

The spider monsters slowly tightened their encirclement, their fangs chattering. Their fear slowly intensified, like a silken noose around their necks.

The cause of it was—

*'No, I should worry about that later! We're already lucky that that monster already left, since we would have no chance of winning against it. Instead, I should focus on the mess in front of us.'*

He shook his head. The existence that led the horde of monsters was no longer on the battlefield. The monsters right here had nothing to do with that existence anymore.

They couldn't hope for reinforcements.

The whole battlefield faced a similar crisis. Since the Demon Lord appeared on the battlefield, their allies were defeated one after another.

It was a hopeless war of attrition, a fight against despair.

Even worse, there was nobody near Rosefeld's group to provide support. Rather, even if there were, they wouldn't be able to help.

*"Shit! So it ends here. Then I should take out as many as I can!"*

Rosefeld gripped his tattered sword, and imbued the remainder of his magic power into it. Strengthening his body, he glared at the spider monsters that were about to jump at any moment.

*"Let them come! Show them the resolve of the elves! Take as many as you can with you to hell!"*

*""""Yes Sir!!!"""*

The other elves responded to Rosefeld's rallying cry. They channeled the rest of their magic power into their swords, intending to fight to the end.

The spider monsters leapt off the ground, their fangs making an eerie sound.

They would fight to the death. Blood and flesh were scattered through the air. Another life, extinguished.

Rosefeld and his comrades desperately fought, but they were hopelessly outnumbered.

Completely overwhelmed, the number of elves still standing slowly decreased.

Time became meaningless to them. The seemed to have fought for an eternity.

Rosefeld lost track of how many monsters he had slaughtered.

The tip of his sword was already bent, but he still impaled the monsters through sheer strength.

*“Behind you, Rosefeld!”*

*“Tch!”*

He forced himself to turn around at his comrade’s warning— and his feet slipped.

*‘Damn it!’*

He didn’t know whether he slipped on the blood of his comrades or the fluids of the monsters. He lost his balance.

He tried to recover his footing, but all the strength left his legs due to fatigue, and he was pushed down by a monster.

‘So this is it.’

The monster’s fangs drew near.

The elf who had warned him was already occupied by other monsters, and wouldn’t come to his aid.

Rosefeld braced himself for death.

Then suddenly—

*<Split!>*

The head of the spider monster that had pinned Rosefeld down went flying as the gleam of a sword flashed by.

‘What?’

Crawling out from under the collapsed monster, what Rosefeld saw was—  
“You elves! Get inside the wall I made! The medics will treat you with healing magic as soon as they can! Hurry!”

His saviour was a young man with long blonde hair tied behind him, and narrow blue eyes. Among the humans, a knight was giving out orders one after another to his subordinates in a clear voice.

*“Humans? You humans... saved us?”*

“Can you stand?”

Rosefeld realized that the knight held out his hand and called out to him to help him up.

“Ah, yes. Thank you.”

Saying his thanks, he took the hand.

The man who killed the monster that had pinned him down smiled gently.

Rosefeld questioned whether or not this was a dream.

*“You might not be able to believe that humans had just come to your aid, but it would be bad if you guys fell here and we got attacked from behind. That’s why General Zaunas ordered us to support you.”*

He judged that Rosefeld was the elves’ commander and spoke to him in Elvish.

*“However, we were only able to spare two hundred men.”*

“Thank you. This is plenty. You saved us”

Rosefeld bowed his head in gratitude. He had thought that there wouldn’t be any reinforcements.

He had believed that fighting alongside humans would hold them back, since the humans would squabble amongst themselves even in battle.

For those humans to have saved him—

“Hey, Kelvin, how long are you going to play around? You can’t do anything but fight, so clean all those things up in one go.”

The knight who was giving out orders a while ago walked over. To even an elf like Rosefeld, he was good-looking.

“Don’t say such an unreasonable thing, Sir Royce. I certainly do like fighting, but even I can’t defeat all those monsters in one go.”

“If you have the time to object, then just hurry up and go!”

“Okay, okay.”

Despite his reluctant sounding words, the young man called Kelvin wore a joyful expression as he leapt into the horde of monsters.

He must have used a unique magic. Every time he swung his sword, a section of the monster the blade hit went flying.

He was strong.

Even Rosefeld could tell that Kelvin was a better swordsman than he was.

Those monsters’ body fluids sprayed onto Kelvin. He didn’t bother wiping it off and instead leapt at his next prey with glee.

“Sheesh, what a battle maniac...”

Royce watched Kelvin fight for a moment, then turned to face Rosefeld, who was still slightly dazed.

*“Are you the elven commander? I am attached to the Remulshil Empire’s Northeastern army, Colonel Royce. I came to support you under Commander Zaunas’s orders. We were told to come under your command. Currently, we are treating the wounded and allowing the troops to recover their stamina, but we will obey your orders.”*

*“...You human knights are under my command?”*

He couldn’t believe it.

All of the races cooperating with each other to defeat the monsters was one thing, but one race taking commands from another race was completely different.

However, Royce smiled boldly while closing one of his eyes.

*“That way, there will not be any confusion. If there are two commanders in*

*this small battlefield, it would cause confusion. Since you have the positional advantage, and there's no time for you to completely recover your magic power, you elves will stay back and give us orders and provide support. That is the most efficient option."*

The elves treated their wounds and recovered any stamina and magic power they could while they devoted themselves to providing command and support from the rear as the human knights fought with Royce and Kelvin at their center.

From a section of the battlefield, the army made of both humans and elves, at a cost, fought the weakened monsters until dawn and were able to prevent the collapse of the defensive line.

*'We always repay our debts. Especially a debt to our brothers-in-arms.'*

Returning to the present, Rosefeld smiled as he arrived in front of the building where the elders were.

A bright flash came from the roots of the World Tree's sapling.

'I'm sorry, Kelvin. I'll get you out of there as soon as I can. That little girl as well. What taint? There isn't any such thing. That girl is innocent. I'll get you out of there quickly, and then treat you guys to good food and drink!'

He smiled at the chance to finally be able to repay his old friend.

In the World Tree sapling's roots, many layers of elaborate patterns from magic formations emerged in mid-air. The formations spun and shone in a bright light.

As the light faded away, two people were in its place.

"Hah, Thank you for bringing me here, Tiara."

"No problem. More importantly, I look forward to meeting your cherished person, Leti."

"Onii-chan probably hasn't arrived. This sure is convenient though. Can we really go anywhere the World Tree's roots reach with this?"[\[2\]](#)

"Well, not anywhere."

“I have to thank Prince Alfred for allowing me to meet Onii-chan.”

“I can’t understand human society. It’s so weird that you can’t move freely even though you’re the Brave.”

“Isn’t it a bit cold?”

“Transfer magic takes time. It must be night already.”

Leticia shivered slightly.

“Well, the sun doesn’t even shine here during the day, so the nights are cold. Should I get you something else to wear?”

“No, it’s fine.”

As they spoke, Leticia and Tiara walked towards the center of the commune.

Noticing the light from the transfer magic, a handful of elves had gathered.

“No way... *The Princess!*?”

“*Why would she come to such a remote place like this?*”

The people greeted the Great Sage Tiara, and a well-known member of the elven royalty, and Leticia the Brave. Tiara raised her hand in response.

*“I am sorry for coming so late in the night. I had thought that guests from the Empire arrived, but...”*

The elves looked at each other.

Four elves stepped out from the crowd.

*“Ah, Princess. You must have come a long way. We extend to you our most sincere welcome. What business brings you here today?”*

*“There should be knights from the Empire here. Have they not arrived?”*

*“The... knights? If it’s about the knights that invaded our territory, then they were brought to the jail.”*

*“Jail!?”*

Leticia, who had been silent as Tiara and the elves conversed, interrupted them.

“*What do you mean by jail?*”

“*Princess, who is that?*”

*Brave Mavis.*

The blood instantly drained from the elders' faces.

"Onii-chan!"

The doors to the magic sealing holding cell were flung open with a bang. [3]

"L-Leti?"

"Huh? Lady Leticia?"

There stood Leticia, who should have been in the Remulshil Empire, panting in the doorway of the cell.

Startled, Wynn threw off the blankets and got up from the floor as quickly as he could.

"Wh-why are you here?"

"Are you alright, Onii-chan? Did they do anything to you?"

"Nothing happened to me. Well, I was locked up here, but..."

"That's good..."

Leticia hugged Wynn with a relieved expression.

Wynn's heart started to race as he was hugged.

"Wh-why are you here, Leti?"

"Of course, I'm going to help you, Onii-chan!"

"Eh? Lady Leticia is going to get involved!?"

Locke also jumped to his feet in shock.

"With Lady Leticia on our side, there's no way we'd lose! Right, Wynn?"

Leticia looked up at Wynn with a wide smile.

If Leticia, who could destroy the Demon Lord and hordes of monsters, were with them, then no matter how many people were part of the Petersian army, they would be no match for her.

"Could it be that you are one of Captain Royce's 'tricks'!?"

Locke looked at Wynn with a cheer, but—

Wynn put his hands on Leticia's shoulders, and gently separated himself from her hug.

"You can't, Leti. You can't come here. Return to the Capital."

Leticia widened her eyes, and Locke became speechless.

The room was dimly lit, and Wynn was looking down, so she couldn't see what expression he was making.

"Why...? Why can't I go with you?"

But Wynn didn't respond, and turned to Kelvin.

"Vice-Captain Kelvin. Was Captain Royce's 'trick' to use myself to involve Leti — no, Brave Leticia van Mavis— in this affair?"

Kelvin did not answer. His silence was a deafening affirmation.

"You wanted to use Leti through myself— through me? Leti is strong. If Leticia fights with us, what about Petersia? Even if all of the Petersian Knight Order were to attack, Leti could singlehandedly defeat them. That's why the Empire desires her power so much! But this isn't Leti consenting to get involved after being asked. This is just dragging Leti in using me. HAVE YOU NO HONOUR!?"

Wynn clenched his fists, seething with anger, and bit on his lips hard enough to make them bleed.

Wynn had become aware of it. He knew that he was Leticia's weak point.

As the Brave, and as a Duke's daughter, she couldn't just leave for the battlefield for his sake.

Society would— never allow it.

The Empire would want to use Leticia's power. However, nobody should be able to use her power against her will.

If only Wynn, himself, weren't involved.

Because Wynn was involved, Leticia prioritized him.

He might even have been locked up for that purpose.

Leticia couldn't be free.

On the other hand, if anybody wanted to control her, the only existence that could truly keep her in check was Wynn.

Royce took advantage of that.

Wynn was used to summon Leticia.

"Leti, go back to the capital. You mustn't participate in this."

Glaring at Kelvin, Wynn walked past Leticia.

"I am very sorry, Vice-Captain. It is true that if Leti— no, Brave Mavis became involved, our victory would be certain. That's why I can't acknowledge this way of doing things."

Kelvin sighed.

"Leti, come here for a bit."

Wynn saluted Kelvin, took the stiffened Leticia's right hand, and led her out of the cell.

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### Translator Notes

1. Well... googling the katakana keeps autocorrecting to Roosevelt. Wikipedia says that Roosevelt is actually derived from Rose and Field... mangle it a bit cuz Roosevelt is a surname, and I got a nature-ish name! — [back](#)
2. ~~Onii-chan is now Big Brother. I'm gonna go full localization because of how this is a Western World. (I wonder if you readers have noticed when I started dropping honorifics? I don't even know...)~~ For now, I'm backpedalling, and going back to Onii-chan... I agree that Big Brother isn't the best TL... I haven't completely given up on localization, but it has to be "perfect", or it won't beat Onii-chan... — [back](#)
3. ~~poor Rosefeld... he was gonna be a badass and repay his debt and all that... then...~~ — [back](#)

# Chapter 43: Confession beneath the Tree of Light ①

The elves were gathered outside the cell.

Seeing Wynn come out pulling Leticia's hand, they made a path.

Standing amongst the crowd, Tiara caught a glimpse of Wynn's angry face and Leticia's teary expression in the light of the World Tree, and started to go after them, but then—

She shook her head, and instructed the other elves in the crowd to avoid getting in the couple's way.

As Tiara and the other elves watched, Wynn and Leticia walked to the towards the World Tree sapling and stopped at its roots.

"How pretty. I can't imagine how many more breathtaking sights there are in the world."

Wynn looked up at the World Tree sapling.

From its trunk, from its branches, from its leaves, many different colored balls of light — red, blue and yellow— spilled out from the all over tree, just like dewdrops of light.

Leticia also looked up.

"...It truly is pretty."

She whispered in amazement.

Unlike Wynn, it wasn't the first time Leticia had seen the World Tree sapling. She had even seen the World Tree in the elven capital.

But when she thought back on it, she didn't remember feeling moved.

The World Tree would normally touch anybody who saw it, but she considered it as moving as a pebble on the roadside. Back then, she thought of the World Tree as a source of magic power for transfer magic. Merely a convenient tool.

Beside Wynn, Leticia also looked at that mystifying sight. She held her hand up and caught one of the floating droplets of light. Like snow, the light melted and dissipated.

“Hey, Leti.”

As he looked up, Wynn started to speak.

“Leti should stop fighting. Especially in battles between humans.”

Leticia looked towards Wynn.

Wynn kept watching the lights floating down from the tree.

“You might be the Brave who slew the Demon Lord. Praised by everybody, admired by the people, respected by all. However—”

His gaze moved from the tree to Leticia.

“You can’t let them believe that you would wield that power against humans. You are strong, Leti. You are extraordinarily strong. If you got involved in a conflict, the side you supported would definitely win. I don’t have much knowledge about the outside world, apart from what I learned in school and read in books. Coming to this elven village made me realize how the world I knew was only a small part of the real world. I truly can’t imagine how big the world really is. Even if I had knowledge of the World Tree sapling, seeing it in person is completely different from seeing it in books.”

Wynn once again looked up at the tree.

“But I do know one thing. People can change their perceptions of you. Since you are a noble of the Empire, it should be justified for you to fight in the defense of the country. But, as Leticia van Mavis the Brave, you can’t do that. You saved the world by defeating the demons. You will not use that power against humans. That’s what the people believe.”

“However, if people begin to believe that you could turn that power towards humanity, then the praise and respect people give you as the Brave can easily turn into fear and paranoia. If that happens, then it’ll be difficult to change their impression of you. They dread the notion that a power that exceeds human understanding could be turned against them. From the Brave to a monster—

you would become the new Demon Lord. I don't want to see Leti thought of that way by other people."

Leticia thought back to the day the oracle proclaimed her the Brave.

Even as they praised her strength, their eyes betrayed their fear as they drew away from her.

—“Is she... really... human?”

—“Could she be a demon in disguise? What a monster...”

—“The Brave really is different from us humans.”

—“She's definitely a monster.”

‘I— I'm not... a monster...’

‘They saw me as an existence that surpassed human limits. That's right, shouldn't I have understood that best? I must have noticed it before Wynn pointed it out to me, right?’

Wynn looked at Leticia, who was crying while hanging her head.

He gently stroked Leticia's hair. The lights emanating from the World Tree caused Leticia's flaxen hair to sparkle.

Those who didn't know better would never believe that this girl possessed immense power. But those who did know would want to obtain her as a pawn to manipulate as they pleased.

The easiest way to do that was to hold Wynn hostage.

‘That's no good. Like this, I'm just holding Leti back... Becoming a knight is my dream. But should I just stop there? What should I do?’

“Hey, Onii-chan...”

Leti spoke right then.

“I understand well why you tell me not to fight. I really needed to realize that I had gotten Onii-chan involved.”

“No, Leti, it's not like that—”

Leti smiled at Wynn's words.

And then, Leticia—

Clatter.

“Ah... S-sorry”

Sherry said in a small voice.

Everybody was startled by that sound.

Sighing, Kelvin leaned back against the wall of the stone cell.

*“Hey, Kelvin. Even though it’s been a long time, you don’t seem lively”  
“There’s nothing to be lively about, being locked up in this place. It’s been a while, Rosefeld. Even though it’s been so many years, you don’t look any different.”*

*“Like I would change after a couple of years or so! — is what I would like to say, but you’ve both changed quite a lot these past few years. Especially Royce. How the heck did he become like that? I almost thought he was a different person when I saw him from afar, you know?”*

*“He became fatter from indulging in his fortunes. He’ll have to cut down quite a bit later... but enough of that.”*

Kelvin then turned towards Locke, who was standing beside him.

*“Please take Sherry out for now. Rosefeld, we will take the girl into our custody. That won’t be a problem, right?”*

*“Right now the Elders are occupied with the preparations for a reception, so...”*

Rosefeld poured two cups of the wine he brought, then held one cup out to Kelvin. Since he was cold, he gratefully received the alcohol. Kelvin drank it all down in one sip.

The sweet and sour taste of the fruit wine filled his mouth.

*“Was what that boy said before true? Were you really trying to use the Brave?”*

“...Eh, well...”

Rosefeld also downed his wine.

*“I don’t intend to criticize you. It’s a reasonable course of action in your*

*position. But for you two, it's not that simple, right?"*

*"Yes. The first step was to find out the enemy's movements from you. They are acting within the forest. There is no way the 'Rulers of the Forest' would not have grasped their actions."*

*"Well, if they entered the forest, that is inevitable. We may not have caught everything, but..."*

Rosefeld and Kelvin exchanged information and plans over the wine.

Once Kelvin heard the information he needed, he stood up.

*"Thank you very much. You helped us out."*

*"I was just repaying my debt to you two. I'll also tell you where their hideout is. Please, have something to eat. It will reflect badly on the Elders if you refuse our hospitality. Especially since the princess is here."*

*"Princess?"*

*"Tiara Sciurus Belfa. You call her the Great Sage, right?"*

*"I see."*

'Oh yeah, the Great Sage was a High Elven princess, wasn't she?'

*"Kelvin. I said that it was a reasonable course of action to use the Brave, but the elves would never allow it. If you humans wrong the Brave in any way, we elves will take her side. Don't forget that."*

Kelvin shrugged off Rosefeld's suddenly lower and harder tone of voice.

He left the cell.

They could hear the sounds of the elves bustling about.

Even though they were separated from the main scouting platoon, and had to return as soon as they could, Kelvin decided that it would be fine to stay a night.

He would be able to get some warm food. Remembering that he had worried about what to eat when he arrived, Kelvin quickly started walking as his stomach growled.

It was the day after the scouting platoon returned to the camp.

*"Sir, Lieutenant Royce wishes to make a report."*

*"I don't want to see him. I would rather eat rubbish than see his ugly face!"*

He dipped a soft loaf of bread into the warm cream stew made with a generous amount of milk. The stew contained the meat and vegetables set aside for the high-ranking officers. Drinking down the luxurious grape wine, General Feyl, commander of the advance troops, started yelling at his guards when he heard the name of the subordinate that he detested the most.

“But Sir, Lieutenant Elstead wishes to report an urgent matter.”

“Shut up. I am in the middle of my meal. If he needs to, he may see me afterwards!”

“B-but...”

“Good morning Sir. While everybody is busy preparing to set out, you are gracefully indulging in your food, I see.”

Brushing aside the knights who were guarding the entrance to the tent, Royce barged into the tent’s spacious interior.

“Imbecile! Who gave you permission to enter! What are you doing, reaching out like that!”

Without minding him, Royce picked up a piece of grilled chicken from the plate atop the table and took a bite. He stroked his chin while holding a piece of the chicken.

As soon as Feyl saw Royce’s face, his appetite became replaced with nausea.

“Wasn’t it an urgent matter? Did you just come here to steal my food!?”

“I am very sorry. It looked so delicious— oh, this is delicious. You can tell that a first-class chef from the Logistics Division made this meal. You should share this with your men.”

Even though he apologized, he wore an unrepentant smile, and kept eating the meat. His every word dripped with sarcasm.

“Didn’t I tell you to stay at the back to protect the commoner last night! Why did you abandon your post?”

“Last night, the girl that we brought back told us the location of the enemy camp. That is what I wish to report.”

“Oh? Where is it?”

“Doria village. Two villages away from Torc Village, where we got the first report.”

“Hmph. How foolish.”

Feyl laughed at Royce.

“Now look here. This is the information we received from the main army. The location of their camp is written here. It is only a few hours from here by horse. We should crush them immediately.”

Feyl smirked and tossed the missive from the main force onto the table. Royce looked down and read it silently.

“We should immediately halt our departure.”

“What!?”

“Sir. Looking at the current state of affairs, it seems that our movements are being leaked to the enemy. Please think about it. There is a traitor within the main army— no, a rebel who was enticed by another country. Those orders may be a trap.”

“What sort of foolish drivel are you spouting? Which one is correct, the information from a village girl, or the information from the main army? Even a fool could tell!”

Enraged, Feyl shouted at Royce, but Royce’s expression remained unperturbed.

“Sir. There seems to be something amiss with the enemy movements. Why is the Petersian army attacking and annihilating villages? If Petersia wanted territory, it doesn’t make sense to act like this. They infiltrated our border defenses, and are slowly going around raiding our territories. It’s only reasonable to believe that there is somebody on the inside guiding their movements.”

Royce pushed aside the dishes on the table, and gestured to the knights who were standing by. Feyl frowned at Royce’s inconsiderate action, but did not object. It may have been because seeing Royce made him lose his appetite.

Royce unrolled a map on the now-cleared table.

“The attacks on the villagers and merchants all happened near the border: within the fiefdoms of Count Valessia, Marquis Remrandt, Marquis Cliffdorf, and regrettably, my own. But of those, only in Marquis Cliffdorf’s lands have merchant caravans been attacked, while none of the villagers were. I believe that the wise General Feyl can connect the dots?”

“M-Marquis Cliffdorf is the traitor, you claim. But is that all supposition?”

“No, of course it is nothing more than a conjecture. The origins of those merchant caravans also haven’t been investigated. But what is more puzzling is their current position. Up until now, we had just barely missed them. We are clearly being guided to that location.”

Feyl also looked down at the map. The route they had taken until then did seem to lead them to the place the latest orders indicated. But it could also be just a coincidence due to their pursuit.

There was something special about that location.

There, the border between the Remulshil Empire and the Kingdom of Petersia was unclear.

But Feyl’s disdain for Royce influenced his judgement. He cast away his suspicions.

“Silence. Nobody will listen to you. The orders are orders. We will move as planned!”

“Then, we should at least scout out the area thoroughly once more before we depart.”

“How insolent! We don’t need to doubt whether or not the orders we received from the main army are real or not. It wastes time and energy. We have five hundred men. They have two hundred. We outnumber them more than two to one. What are you so afraid of?”

Incensed, Feyl accused Royce of being a coward.

“The expedition has been decided upon. Anymore will be seen as insubordination.”

“...Please excuse me.”

Royce bowed. Dissatisfaction clearly lingered on his face.

“...Lieutenant Royce. What’s with that expression? I see... You really are scared of the enemy.”

“I don’t fear them. I don’t even know who our enemies are.”

“By the way, your squadron was in charge of protecting that commoner. I had told you to stay in the back, but if the commoner hangs around among the other knights, it would affect morale. You will protect the commoner in the rearguard.”

“...Are you referring to when we reach the battlefield?”

“That’s right. Life is precious to you, right? Honorable Count. You will comply with the request, right? You will be sent to the back to protect the commoner. The orders give you the perfect opportunity to flee from the battle. Rather, you will become a hero for saving the people.”

Royce smiled along with Feyl’s coarse laughter.

“I see. That will be fine. I do think life is precious. I will take the commoner to the rearguard and protect her there.”

With a salute, Royce left the tent.

“What a coward!”[\[3\]](#)

Feyl spat at Royce’s back.

Royce paid no heed to him and continued to walk away.

‘Good. I have now removed him from the battlefield. There is no way he can meddle anymore.’

Feyl looked at the orders solemnly. They were to use their numerical advantage to overrun the enemy’s camp.

‘Those guys are history. I have the upper hand. Soon, I will...’

Those thoughts made Feyl more determined.

“Thanks for your work, Lieutenant Royce. How did it go?”

Royce shook his head.

“Rejected as usual. He didn’t listen.”

The previous night, Rosefeld had visited Royce in secret. He told him where the enemy base was.

“I had wanted to stay behind and observe.”

“Is there a problem?”

Royce recounted his exchange with General Feyl.

“It’s clearly a trap. What should we do?”

“We can just stay at the back and protect the civilians. I promised to do that. We can act independently. I don’t want to fight, but it doesn’t seem that we can avoid it. If that happens, Reeno and Wedge’s movements will become critical. Well, I guess all my preparations won’t have been in vain.”

Royce smiled at Kelvin.

Kelvin couldn’t be faulted for thinking ‘Whoa, what a vicious smile.’

Under the pretense of going to the rearguard to protect the commoners, Wynn’s platoon advanced and went towards Doria village, the village Rosefeld had indicated.

Right there, was the enemy base.

Reeno and Wedge were currently headed towards Count Elstead’s territory.

They carried a letter from Lieutenant Royce—Count Elstead— asking him for reinforcements.

As a noble with the influence of a Count himself, Royce had his own personal knight order.

It would be beyond his authority to arbitrarily summon troops, but Royce wasn’t attached to his own status. He would do anything to protect his territory.

Wynn’s squadron approached the edge of the village, observing it. They could see several houses, a few fields, and some chickens being raised.

The chickens were grazing outside the coop, clucking.

It seemed like an ordinary idyllic village.

However, instead of villagers, armoured men holding swords and spears walked the streets and fields.

They weren't the original inhabitants of Doria Village. It was likely that they were all confined in one of the buildings.

Some of the men wore simple clothing and worn-out leather armour. They weren't Petersian soldiers, they were probably the bandits and mercenaries that were colluding with them.

Among them, they could see a group of soldiers with uniform metal armour and weapons.

Unlike the unruly bandits, their disciplined movements clearly indicated that they were knights.

"Hm? That man... Where have I...?"

Upon seeing an aged man among the group, Kelvin felt a tinge of unease.

If he was from Petersia, Kelvin shouldn't have met the old man before, but the old man still felt familiar.

The man who appeared to be the leader rode on horseback at the front of the group.

They were planning on attacking the advance force from behind.

The three people could only grind their teeth in frustration as they watched the group depart. The reinforcements from Count Elstead had not arrived.

They could only see seven or eight people left behind to guard the base.

It would be better for them to join up with the reinforcements from the Knight Order of Count Elstead's fiefdom. Sherry and Royce had stayed behind to wait for the reinforcements.

Locke, Wynn and Kelvin quietly turned back— rather, they were about to turn back.

With a crash, a young girl was flung out of a building.

Two— no, three men came out from the door. They wore vulgar smiles on their faces.

They kicked the girl, who was desperately trying to get up and run away while screaming, and then leaned over her. They ripped off her plain villager's clothing.

The girl screamed once again.

Wynn clenched his teeth, trying to hold back his anger.

“Those... those bastards.”

Locke clenched his teeth, watching the barbaric scene angrily.

“Please bear with it. We need to wait for reinforcements first. Then we can save them all.”

Despite his words, Wynn could see unbridled rage in his eyes.

“...I’m sorry, Vice-Captain... I wanted to... No, I **will** become a knight who protects the weak. Before my eyes is somebody who needs help. I can’t just abandon her!”[\[4\]](#)

“Wynn...”

Kelvin sighed.

“...As a commander, I would have to reject that reasoning. It’s too idealistic. If you lose sight of the forest for the trees, you could lose everything... However...”

The corners of Kelvin’s lips curled up slightly.

“Frankly, I also agree with your point of view. Captain Royce might get angry, but if it’s just some bandits of that level, the three of us will be fine.”

“Right now, everybody is looking at that girl. They’re full of openings, Vice-Captain.”

Locke, who was monitoring the village as he listened to Kelvin and Wynn’s conversation, cut in.

Even the men who were supposed to be keeping watch were also looking at the men surrounding the woman, not paying attention to their surroundings..

“Let’s go!”

On Kelvin’s command, they all leapt from behind the thickets where they were hiding.

“Wha!?”

“What is it?”

Wynn slipped past the guards, who had their backs turned to him. He jumped into the middle of the men surrounding the girl.

He swung his sword. All the men around the dishevelled victim were cut down in an instant.

They couldn’t put up much resistance, since they taken off their armour and thrown their weapons off to the side.

Wynn slashed the backs of the men who were crawling away while letting out pitiful moans.

“You bastards!”

The lookouts came to their senses and tried to counterattack, but were stabbed in the back with the spear in Locke’s hands.

“I’ll leave this place to you!”

Saying that over his shoulder, Kelvin leapt into the building where the other villagers were being held.

He wanted to defeat the bandits before the ones inside realized what was going on outside and took hostages.

They heard angry shouts from the bandits and screams from the villagers, but it soon became quiet.

“That was easier than I thought.”

Kelvin walked out of the building, blood dripping from the sword dangling in his hand.

“Wh-Who are you...?”

An elderly man followed Kelvin out of the building. After him came an elderly

woman, who rushed towards the woman that the men had pinned down and hugged her.

“Now, we should evacuate... but that will be a bit difficult, won’t it?”

‘Shit... I’ll kill them.’

One of the men Wynn had cut, the bandit group’s second-in-command, felt his consciousness slowly fading away. However, fueled by anger and vengeance, he held on.

He was once a knight of a knight order.

He simply loved to kill.

But during the war with the Demon Lord’s monsters, that personality was not a problem.

Rather, skilled as he was in the Knight Order, he was a hero on the front lines, where his personality was extremely convenient.

However, after the war, his personality became too much for the knight order.

When those times of spending everyday doing nothing but fight were replaced by a time of peace, he couldn’t adapt.

One day, he went a bit too far during one of the missions.

Instead of just killing just the monsters, he ended up attacking civilians and other knights too.

After fleeing the Knight Order before they could punish him, he eventually ended up as a bandit.

As a former knight, he was more skilled than the chief, but since he disliked thinking hard, he was content as the second-in-command.

‘I’ll kill them... I’ll beat them to death. I’ll kill you all too!’

In the end, he was taken by surprise, and would die a dog’s death, but he put the last of his energy into chanting a spell. It was an explosion spell he learned during his time as a knight.

Not much time had passed since the aged man had left Doria Village with the

troops.

“Locke! That one is still alive!”

‘Too late! Go to hell, you bastards!’

With a ghastly smile, the man detonated a nearby building with his spell..

On the brink of death, the explosion wasn’t as large as he had hoped, but it was enough to bring down the worn-out building.

The building collapsed with a thunderous crash.

“Shoot!”

Locke finished the man off with his spear.

“Hurry up, please. That sound will cause the enemy to come back!”

‘How could there still be somebody who could use magic...!’

Kelvin clenched his teeth.

The enemy would be able to chase them down on horseback if they simply fled.

“To the forest! Hurry!”

They could only flee into the forest, where the horses couldn’t follow. Kelvin showed the villagers the place where Royce was waiting.

‘Now the rest is up to fate. I’ll leave it to you, Wynn. I’ll also rely on you, Captain Royce!’

The sound of the hoofsteps gradually grew louder. The sounds announced impending death, but Kelvin just smiled fearlessly and drew his sword.

“Now then, I think the chances of winning this gamble are quite high. I just have to try a bit harder!”

Wynn held up his sword, and Locke prepared his spear.

And then, in the corner of the town square, three men faced off against two hundred men.

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Translator Notes

1. I was tempted to use the word “milksop”, but I chose not to... — [back](#)
2. Slightly lost in translation: the two “I”’s are a change in pronoun. The first time is **自分**, a more polite, humble pronoun. The second time, it’s **俺**... forceful and direct. — [back](#)

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Sorry it’s late! I blame my fun summer lab! It’s somehow more fun than school! Translating code from C++ to Java made me a bit too tired to translate from Japanese to English... Tehepero~

I was aiming to at least get this chapter done by May 31st, since that was exactly a year after I started TLing this series...

Well, after some thought, and to those who commented on last chapter, I have changed it back to Onii-chan... (I can’t remember if I’ve changed it in the previous chapter... somebody tell me, cuz I’m a bit too lazy to check...) I feel like Onii-chan’s equivalent in English would be a sort of pet name, and not Big Brother. I can’t think of a good pet name, since Wynn is already short.

I propose another solution, but I don’t expect anybody, including me, to like it...

Wynn -> Win -> Victor

Onii-chan -> Vick

This is a long TL note/rant... Anyways. For those confused by the timeskips, the chronology for Wynn should be something like this:

1. Wynn leaves on the bandit subjugation mission
2. Wynn spends a few nights scouting and finding (planted) false positives
3. Royce reveals his traitor suspicions to Wynn, and has his “little tricks”
4. Wynn gets captured by elves and meets Sherry
5. Wynn talks to Leti under the Tree of Light, and ???
6. Wynn arrives back at the camp, with Sherry (the one extra person in that one chapter)
7. Feyl fails to make a good decision.
8. Wynn kills rapists
9. To be continued!

## Chapter 44: Confession beneath the Tree of Light ②

With his dying breath, the chief's second-in-command cast an explosion spell.

As he intended, the explosion successfully caused his allies to return to Doria Village, but the sound also alerted Royce to the fact that the situation had changed.

Royce, along with the young woman who was waiting with him, hurried towards Doria Village.

"Are you scared?"

Breathing heavily as he moved, Royce asked her a question. Her face was hidden by the hood she wore. The young woman didn't answer, and merely set her eyes straight ahead as she walked.

Impatience, Fear, Grief.

She was heading to a battlefield, but she showed none of those emotions, but rather, a displayed a solid determination and resolution.

She focused on walking straight ahead. She didn't answer the question, nor did her eyes waver.

Royce silently mocked himself as he moved his gaze away from the girl to stare forward once more.

'Well, it's a natural reaction.'

She had been with Kelvin, Wynn and Locke when they met back up with Royce. At that time, he could plainly see the wariness on her face.

Despite being in his mid-thirties, his belly was as fat as a beer barrel, his head was bald, his face was round and squishy, and his chin was flabby. Moreover, his sharp, appraising eyes made it look like he was always plotting something sinister.

Royce himself didn't realize how repulsed females would be upon seeing him for the first time.

His appearance didn't give her a favorable first impression, and on top of that, their interactions that time couldn't be called positive. She couldn't be faulted for being wary of Royce.

Talking as they moved used up his energy.

Royce did not try to start another conversation with the girl.

---

It was three against two hundred.

Against such an overwhelming difference in numbers, Wynn's side would normally have no chance of winning.

But the enemy was wary of the fact that there were only three of them.

Sure enough, the aged man who appeared to be the leader sent five knights and around a dozen bandits under his command at them.

They probably suspected some sort of ambush lay in wait for them.

If they recklessly charged into the plaza, they might face a coordinated volley of ranged attack magic from all sides.

"Split up!"

Wynn and the others were lucky that there were only a few people.

The three of them ran off to different parts of the village.

Wynn dashed into a nearby two-story building.

He could never win against mounted knights, so he moved to a place where the knights couldn't stay on horseback.

"Stop there!"

"Aren't I acting like a street urchin right now!?"

With that thought, Wynn ran up the stairs.

Then, Wynn heard a thud! The three men kicked the wooden door open, then rushed in after him.

"Hehehe... you ran into a dead end."

"I'll slaughter ya fer lookin' down on us."

They yelled as they charged at him.

Waiting at the top of the stairs, Wynn sidestepped a spear and slashed the first charging man.

It would be a different matter if he were facing magically-strengthened knights, but against simple bandits and mercenaries, Wynn's diligent training gave him the advantage, despite being outnumbered.

While he was thrown off balance by the slash to his chest, Wynn kicked him with all his might.

"Whoa!"

"Shit!"

The man fell over, bumping into the two people behind him, and they all ended up falling down the stairs.

Without a second glance at the men at the bottom of the stairs, Wynn dashed into the room at the top of the stairs, and then jumped out of one of the windows.

Before he ran into the building, he confirmed that there was a shed beside it. He planned to land on top of it.

For a moment, Wynn was worried that the planks that made up the roof would give in, but he landed safely.

With the momentum from the jump he dashed across the roof.

Then, he jumped once again.

"Wha? Yo— Agh!"

He rammed into a knight on horseback, and they both tumbled to the ground.

One of them had expected the fall, while the other didn't, so the one that did, got up quicker.

It was also fortunate that the armour they wore was different.

Wynn's leather armour was lighter than the metal armour the knight wore, so he got up faster.

Ignoring the fallen knight, he mounted the horse, and grabbed its reins.

“Locke!”

Wynn rode towards Locke, who was fighting in an alley between two houses, where horses didn’t fit.

“What!?”

Seeing his opponents hurriedly jump out of the way, Locke ran towards Wynn’s horse and jumped on.

“You saved me there, Wynn.”

“They’re behind us! Some magic would be nice!”

“You two, come over here!”

Having already stolen a horse, Kelvin took the lead. His body was soaked in blood. Wynn decided that it was probably his opponents’ blood.

As Wynn and Locke neared where Kelvin was fighting, they saw a horse that had lost its right leg. Beside it, they could see the figures of two slain enemies.

Wynn wondered how Kelvin even defeated a mounted knight.

Seeing that they had stolen the horses, the enemy realized that there was probably no ambush.

All of the knights sprang into action.

“Locke!”

“I’m on it!”

Clinging onto Wynn’s back, Locke used wind magic to deflect the arrows. They were lucky that there were only two horses.

After all, Locke could only protect a small area.

“Into the forest!”

With those orders from Kelvin, they rode into the narrow forest paths

The knights pursued them.

“You helped me with the arrows!”

Holding onto Wynn, Locke thanked him.

Locke could deflect the arrows with wind magic, but he couldn't completely defend against the barrage of attack magic.

At first, the three of them weren't riding horses, and wore lightweight armour. The knights must have thought that they were merely adventurers or mercenaries.

Neither their magic nor their arrows hit their target.

On horseback, it was hard to cast attack magic, and even if they fired arrows, Locke would change the arrows' trajectory by using magic.

The knights were slowly catching up to Wynn and Locke. Even though the knights were equipped with heavy armour, their horses could still move faster than a horse with two people on it. On the other hand, Kelvin's horses, unburdened, had already left them far behind.

"Shoot, we're not there yet!?"

Locke, who had been watching their backs to avoid being hit by arrows, called out.

At that moment—

"Captain Royce!"

Kelvin called out to Royce, who he had spotted running with heavy footsteps.

"Hah... Hah... The people... fled into the forest... Quickly... I leave the rest to you."

Kelvin stopped his horse right beside Royce. Meanwhile, Wynn and Locke's horse ran past them.

That was when the battle began.

---

"Hey, Onii-chan..."

Leticia smiled, her face illuminated by the puffs of light emanating from the tree.

"I understand well why you tell me not to fight. I really needed to realize that

I had gotten Onii-chan involved—”

Cutting off Wynn’s protest, Leticia gently stroked Wynn’s cheek.

She looked at Wynn affectionately. Her eyes were occasionally tinged with heartache, but soon cleared up.

“Thank you, Onii-chan. Thank you for worrying about me, but I must apologize.”

Pausing for a moment, Leticia looked down. She then looked back up, resolution in her eyes.

She looked straight at Wynn with an unsmiling, serious expression.

“I am sorry. The one who taught me the warmth of human kindness was you. The one who taught me how to fight was you. Because I met you, I realized that I wasn’t alone in this wide world. That’s why I want to walk alongside you. I want to fight alongside you. Even if I have to hurt others, even if people start calling me a monster, even if all of humanity brands me as a Demon Lord. I still want to walk alongside you. That is my selfishness. I will fight of my own free will.”

“— Even if the world doesn’t acknowledge me, as long as you do, that is enough.”

---

Wynn and Locke ran past Royce. Then, the person beside Royce went into action.

It was only for an instant, but the hooded figure met Wynn’s eyes.

Wynn bit his lips in frustration.

‘Right now, I am not worthy of standing by her side. But someday...’

---

Kelvin pulled Royce up onto the horse, as he looked towards the hooded figure and the enemy knights.

‘This is bad...’

Kelvin’s body trembled as he felt an overwhelming desire.

‘I want to fight. I want to slaughter to my heart’s content.’

Despite telling Wynn and Locke to flee from the army of two hundred at Doria Village, he was holding back a desire to charge forward. Of course, he didn't believe he would win.

He didn't think he would lose to a ragtag group of a hundred mercenaries and bandits, but there were a hundred more knights. Against mounted knights, they would only be able to take down three or four knights at best.

He savored the euphoria he felt from marking the border between life and death.

He was willing to risk his life to feel that rush of pleasure.

The two hundred men before him looked delicious. They were first-class prey.

Bloodlust swelled up.

He couldn't contain it any longer

"Hey, Kelvin. Your bad habit is coming out again."

Royce, who had finally clambered onto the horse, called out to Kelvin, bringing Kelvin back to his senses.

"...What are you talking about? Anyways, shouldn't you lose some weight, Captain? I pity the horse for having to bear such a heavy burden."

"Urgh... I'm really sorry."

Kelvin regained his calm and made a light-hearted rejoinder.

Making sure that Royce was holding on tight, he urged the horse forward.

The hooded figure didn't even look back at Kelvin.

The hooded figure didn't even react to the hostility— or rather, the bloodlust — that had silenced the knights that had picked a fight with Wynn and the others when they had first arrived at the camp.

'I see. What a monster. That was close. I almost cut him down.'

If Royce hadn't noticed Kelvin's bloodlust and called out to him, he would have cut Royce down. Royce had interacted with Kelvin for a long time now. It was easy for him to tell what Kelvin was thinking.

‘But it feels like we just bicker all the time.’

Royce desperately struggled to keep his balance on the horse.

Smiling inwardly at the sight of his superior’s efforts, Kelvin decided that he would have to discuss Count Elstead’s eating habits and relationship with women some time soon.

---

Just as Royce and Kelvin had finally started moving, the pursuing knights came upon a hooded figure standing in the middle of the road.

The hooded figure stood in the middle of a small clearing in front of them.

Upon seeing the hooded figure blocking their path, the leader of the knights raised his hand to stop the knights.

The knights split into two groups. One to apprehend the hooded figure, and one to continue the purs—

Whoosh! They felt a gust of wind, and before they knew it, the hooded person had drawn their sword.

A long groove in the ground appeared in front of the group that was about to continue their pursuit.

“Who the heck are you!”

One of the knights called out.

The figure threw off the hood. They could see golden hair billowing in the wind, and a pair of emerald green eyes.

The young woman’s breathtaking beauty caused most of the knights to be lost for words, but a few of them were trembling in fear.

“Magic... Q-Quickly, cast magic! Everyone, give it all you have!!”

One of the knights, trembling in fear, lost control and started screaming.

Some of the spellbound knights came to their senses and tried to hurriedly cast a spell.

However, the number of spells that were cast was far below the knight’s expectations.

Even then, the few Flame Arrows that were cast all hit the young woman, igniting the area with raging flames.

“You imbeciles! I said all of you, and with all your power!”

However, the knight’s allies only returned bewildered gazes to his impatient shouts.

There was a reason.

She certainly was a beautiful woman, but that was it. Rather, the blaze they had just cast was overkill. Even though it was part of their orders, many of the knights felt that it would be a pity to kill off such a young and beautiful woman.

“Again! Fire the next volley!”

None of his allies sympathised with the knight’s desperate cries.

But when the flames died down and the smoke cleared, the perplexed knights also paled.

They finally understood why that knight was so frantic.

The young woman had not moved a step.

The young woman’s clothes were not even singed, and not a hair on her head was disturbed.

She stood there boldly, as if nothing had happened.

Most of them held the status of Chevalier. They weren’t poor, but they weren’t particularly affluent.

That was why none of them had ever seen her in person. At most, they had only seen her likeness in a portrait.

They knew of her. They knew she was only fourteen. They knew she had golden hair, emerald eyes, and a beautiful face. They also knew that she was the third daughter of Duke Mavis, one of the prominent nobles of the Remulshil Empire.

They slowly realized who she was.

Mavis the Brave—Leticia van Mavis—was standing before them.

“First of all, you all have made a mistake. I won’t hesitate to kill all of you. If I had any hesitation, I would not have been able to survive my journey. That’s why, not a single one of you will leave here alive. Please prepare yourselves.”

“Waaaaaaaaah!”

This time, all of the knights cast a spell with all their might.

With a violent boom, the numerous flame arrows created a pillar of fire high into the sky.

“Attack! Attack! Attack !”

They no longer knew who was screaming. Everybody was casting as many spells as they could.

They put their all into each spell they cast.

Eventually, after having expended as much magic power as they could, the knights sank to the ground, gasping for air.

All of their gazes were glued to one spot.

The raging inferno gradually subsided. Suddenly, a violent gust of wind blew away all the smoke.

Leticia emerged from the smoke, without a burn on her, or a speck of ash on her clothes.

“Eeeek!”

“A monster!”

The once orderly ranks of knights broke ranks and fled in panic.

Throwing away their pride and reputation, the knights tried to flee into the forest, pushing their supposed allies aside as they fled.

But it was futile.

“W-What?”

“How did we end up back here?”

They should have fled into the forest, but in the next instant, they found themselves back where they were. Those who had fled towards Doria Village

also ended up in that same clearing.

“Forest of Illusions— The forest is our domain. In order to protect it, I cast a barrier spell.”

A single elf appeared— it was Tiara Sciurus Belfa.

A single person cast a barrier spell that would normally require the magic power of several individuals to cast it.

“Impossible! Elves don’t interfere with human fights, right?”

“This is a diplomatic issue!”

“We elves are not interfering. We are merely protecting the forest.”

Tiara’s dispassionate tone doused the incensed knights’ protests.

“A-Ah...”

With nowhere to run, the knights looked at Leticia. She released countless balls of red light.

She casually sent those lights at them.

The knights instantly chanted a Barrier spell. It was a fruit of their daily training. However, that barrier was quickly pierced.

Many knights fell with cries of anguish.

Only a handful of knights remained. Most of them had used all of their magic power to attack Leticia from the very beginning.

They had been skilled enough to notice Leticia’s overwhelming power.

They hadn’t blocked Leticia’s spell, but due to the barrier absorbing most of the power, they were merely sent flying. Their whole body ached, and their limbs were bent in unnatural directions. They were on the brink of death.

They had lost all will to fight.

Leticia sighed.

“Thank you, Tiara.”

“I was merely protecting the forest. We elves do not interfere in fights between humans. Sorry, one of them escaped.”

The normally expressionless Tiara wore a rare expression of regret.

“The leader?”

“Yes.”

As the knights were enthralled by Leticia, one person had silently observed the situation.

He must have somehow escaped while Leticia’s line of sight was hidden by the second barrage of flames.

By the time she had cleared away the smoke, the man was nowhere to be seen.

He had enough power to break through the Great Sage’s barrier spell.

‘I might have let a dangerous enemy escape.’

As she thought that, Leticia turned around and started running to where Wynn would be waiting.

# Chapter 45: New movements ①

“I am very sorry, Sir.”

In a tent at the corner of the Imperial Knight Order main campground, Jade van Cliffdorf sifted through paperwork. Upon hearing a familiar voice behind him, he looked up.

The owner of the voice was the middle-aged knight who had been a close confidant of the Cliffdorf Marquisate. He should have been carrying out a top-secret mission.

“Claus. Did something happen?”

The sky was growing dark.

The knights and soldiers were busy with preparations for the next day's expedition and the night watch.

The aged knight — Claus was given a separate mission because it would have been risky if anybody had questioned him. However, if he had returned to the camp, a problem must have come up.

“I am very sorry. I have lost all of the knights Your Lordship had entrusted to me with.”

Upon hearing Claus's apology, Jade's face hardened for a moment.

“What happened?”

“Mavis the Brave, and Count Elstead's militia got in the way. The prisoners have also been freed.”

“What a failure.”

“I can only apologize. I deserve to be punished.”

“We will get back at them next time. Did you make sure it was actually the Brave?”

“Yes.”

"Then that is fine. Did they discover the origin of the dead knights?"

"Their identities are impossible to establish."

"Erase all those who have been captured. Seal the lips of anybody who could shed information on the knights' origins. Use any means necessary."

Claus's presence melted away.

Jade tossed the documents he had been reading onto his desk.

'I had heard that Mavis the Brave and Prince Alfred had a marriage interview at the royal villa, but this must mean that there is a connection between Count Elstead and Prince Alfred.'

General Feyl and the other top officers leading the advance party were expendables to the Cliffdorf Faction.

Most of the knights weren't even in the employ of the Cliffdorfs.

As a small player in the Cliffdorf Faction, General Feyl happily moved according to Jade's wishes.

He did not even suspect that he was being fed false information, and was led into attacking an army of three thousand Petersian soldiers.

He was outnumbered six to one.

The advance party would fight in vain, then be annihilated before the main army arrived.

Feyl retreated, and had barely set foot into the main army's camp before being apprehended.

Feyl was to take responsibility for the crushing defeat the army suffered.

'Royce van Elstead, and Kelvin Warner...'

They had both been Commander Zaunas's aides.

Jade's father, Welt van Cliffdorf, was on the verge of consolidating his power over the army when Zaunas disturbed his plan.

Through their significant achievements during the war against the Demon Lord, they had been promoted to the rank of General. However, it was only

nominal, and they were left to stagnate in managerial positions. Then, when the coup occurred, they were both demoted to the rank of Lieutenant.

Furthermore, he had actually placed them in the advance party to eliminate them.

‘No way, could they have made use of his demotion?’

They must have been acting as the proxies of Prince Alfred, who was skilled in bureaucratic politics.

It was unlikely that Wynn Byrd became Royce’s subordinate by chance.

Escorting the civilians in the rear of the army was the perfect justification to avoid fighting the enemy.

Royce had summoned his territory’s knights without permission, but he could just insist that he was protecting his territory to avoid any repercussions. Due to Elstead’s army acting as a diversion, the Petersian army would be unable to destroy the advance party.

‘I must rely on Father to act.’

He had tried to prevent Royce from acting in his territory by occupying him with a meaningless bureaucratic job, but Royce immediately became a threat once he left the Capital.

Jade took a pen and began writing a letter to his father at the Imperial Knight Order Headquarters.

An incident arose from that single adventurer’s report.

The Kingdom of Petersia denied the Remulshil Empire’s claims that Petersian soldiers were invading the empire while disguised as bandits, and instead claimed that Imperial Soldiers had ambushed their army while their army was carrying out military exercises.

Those who knew the truth kept their mouths shut, and the tensions between the Remulshil Empire and Petersia Kingdom increased.

---

A few days had passed since the battle at Doria Village.

Wynn and the others escorted the girl, who had ended up as the only

surviving villager, to Torc village.

Torc Village was in ruins.

Many buildings had been burnt down.

Not a single building remained intact.

Remains could be seen all over the village.

A rotten stench filled the air.

The bodies bore no marks of being disturbed by stray dogs, rats, or monsters, but they did suffer from insects and some of the bones were exposed.

Sherry gaped at the sight of the ruined village, which had become unrecognizable. She took one step into the village, then fell to the floor, vomiting.

Reeno supported Sherry, and brought her to a nearby tree with fresher air.

Wynn, Locke, and Wedge, had led the soldiers from Nest Town here. The soldiers began gathering the bodies in one place.

Acting on Sherry's testimony, the soldiers had searched the highway between Nest Town and Torc village.

If the bodies were just left there, it could cause a plague to spread.

"Riggs..."

Wynn spotted somebody he knew from the remains.

When Wynn became an adventurer, Riggs had helped him out in many ways.

Wynn lifted up Riggs's cold, lifeless body.

Tears started dripping down his cheeks.

Suddenly coming back to her senses, Sherry went to help the soldiers gather the corpses. She had to be feeling much more grief than he was, but she remained stoic.

Reeno accompanied Sherry as she worked.

The soldiers piled up the remains, along with any usable wood from the ruins of the buildings, and set it all on fire.

If it were possible, they would have buried each body one at a time and mourned each one individually.

However, since there would be no one to maintain a graveyard there, their remains could end up being unearthed by wild dogs, or end up turning into undead from all the negative energy and miasma.

The scarlet flames illuminated Sherry's face as she prayed for the villager's peaceful rest.

As Wynn watched the sparks float up into the night sky, he thought that they looked like souls ascending into the heavens.

"Now what do we do, I wonder?"

After cremating the villagers, Wynn and the others returned to Simurgh.

"Do you have anybody you could live with?"

Sherry shook her head.

"Mother never left Torc village. And since my father was an elf, I guess I would have some relatives on that side of the family, but..."

Sherry brought her hand to her ears, which were covered by a hood. She then made a troubled smile.

"I see... It's because you're a half-elf..."

Reeno nodded in understanding.

Elves loathed anybody who had both elven and another race's blood in their veins.

They possessed longevity, so they tended to look down on other races, seeing their short lives as a defect.

They would never accept Sherry, who would be considered to have tainted blood.

Wynn and Locke understood exactly how they had treated her in the elven village.

"That's why, I want to find work somewhere in the capital."

"You do know that the Capital isn't the best place to be, right? Due to the tensions between the Empire and Petersia, the people have been uneasy. Refugees like them are flooding into cities like the Capital and Clennad, which is causing some disturbances."

As a merchant's son, Locke knew the situation well.

Scores of refugees crowded around the city walls.

The slums grew, as the refugees constructed crude huts.

The public order deteriorated, despite the efforts of the empire's guards and knights.

Not everyone trying to enter the city were refugees. Some had properly paid the entry tax and were trying to start a new life in the city.

Those people needed work, but due to the rapid influx of new residents, there was a labor surplus.

The young and able-bodied could enlist in the army as a soldier, but a young woman like her only had so many options.

As a half-elf, those options were even more limited.

As they were cleaning up Torc Village, Sherry had sold the belongings she had with her to pay the entry tax and enter the Capital.

The little money she had left would have to support her until she found work.

"I know, if you are fine with it, I know a good place."

Wynn wanted to refer her to the place that had supported him: The Wandering Bird's Roost.

"Eh? A good place?"

Locke tilted his head.

He had seen Wynn work, and didn't think that the hard work and low wages made it good work.

"The wages are low, but if you consider that meals are included, it's not bad."

"But, Wynn. What will you do? If Sherry works there, then won't you lose

your job?"

"It seems like that a war is brewing, so I don't think I'll be able to work at the inn for a while. So, instead of having to look for a replacement, if I refer Sherry, isn't it a win-win situation?"

"I am fine with any work I can get."

With that, it was decided, and they all headed towards the Wandering Bird's Roost.

The peak lunchtime hours had passed, but that didn't mean that there were no more customers. Mark was able to take all the orders himself, while Randell and Hanna listened to Wynn and Locke explain Sherry's circumstances.

They explained how she was the sole survivor of a village razed by enemy soldiers.

Without any relatives, and as a half-elf, she had no other alternatives other than to come to the Capital to look for work and a place to live.

Wynn told them that due to the increased tensions with Petersia, Wynn would have to take part in military activities and would have little time to work at the inn.

"I see. What can you do?"

After listening to their explanation, Randell asked Sherry a question.

"I can cook, do the laundry, or clean the inn pretty well. I can also read, write, count, and use some magic..."

"Magic is not needed. But it's good that you can read and write."

"Since Wynn won't be here, we would have to hire another person anyways. If you can read and do calculations, then that is enough. I don't have a problem with it."

The inn's main guests were travellers, like merchants and adventurers.

Randell and Hanna wouldn't have any prejudice towards her being a half-elf.

The discussion ended smoothly, and Sherry would begin working the next day.

---

"It's a bit cramped, and there are various things in here, but you'll grow to like it."

Wynn was showing Sherry the shed behind the inn.

After losing his parents, Wynn had lived there for many years. It was filled with memories.

Since Wynn now stayed at the Knight Academy's lodgings, Sherry would be able to live here.

Sherry timidly followed Wynn into the shed and looked around.

"It's a bit run down, so you'll have to do some repairs, though. Sorry about how cramped it is."

"It's fine. I'm good at fixing things."

Sherry smiled at the apologetic-looking Wynn.

She didn't really mind it.

She had heard that servants rarely even get a room like this.

They would either stay in an attic, or share a room with another person.

The room would barely be able to fit four adults, but it was relatively spacious for a personal room.

The shed smelled slightly musty from disuse, but it would go away once she cleaned it up.

As for preventing burglary, it would need a bit of work.

Wynn was gathering the few belongings that still remained in the shed, when he heard a chant.

*"I command the power of the world, return to your origin!"*

After the chant was completed, the small shed became bathed in light.

"W-What?"

Surprised, Wynn ran outside.

He saw his friends standing stiffly outside.

He followed their gazes and saw a woman casting a spell. Her eyes were closed in concentration.

Waves of light emanated from her right hand, and the scraps of wood that made up the walls and the roof underwent a change. Soon, the shed looked as if it had been built just the day before.

The light gradually faded away.

The run-down shed looked as if it were brand-new.

The holes that Wynn had worked arduously to cover for years were no more.

The woman took a deep breath, then wordlessly turned towards her dumbfounded spectators.

She had deep blue eyes, immaculate white skin, and green hair.

But her most distinct characteristic was her long ears.

“Great Sage Tiara...”

“I need to talk with you. Please come with me to the Knight Order Headquarters.”

The Great Sage, elven princess Tiara Sciurus Belfa, stared straight into Wynn’s eyes.

## Chapter 46: New movements ②

A meeting to discuss the recent campaign, and Petersia's involvement, was held in a room of the palace.

Prince Alfred presided over the meeting. In attendance were ministers in charge of domestic affairs, bureaucrats, officers of General rank and above, and also certain nobles.

They were discussing whether or not to wage war against Petersia.

Open debate was permitted, so there were various discussions all over the room.

Petersia's landmass was no more than two-thirds that of the empire, but unlike the Empire, Petersia did not border the land ruled by the Demon Lord.

Due to that, their military power had not decreased as much by the war against the Demon Lord's army.

In addition to that, a rumor was spreading amongst them.

"Have you also heard the rumours, Sir?"

"I heard that she single-handedly annihilated an army of a thousand."

"Rumor has it that she cut down a hundred men with a single swing of her sword, and blew away a village with a single spell. Her strength must be outrageous."

"But, the Brave's strength is terribly strong. With that power around, how can we ever relax? Rather, couldn't she end up ruling the whole continent?"

The warmongers gradually voiced the rumours louder and louder.

Some of them were hopeful that if the Brave participated, then they would win the war against Petersia.

'What rubbish.'

Royce berated them in his mind.

Royce attended the Imperial Council as a feudal lord of a territory that bordered Petersia.

*They were trying to wield the Brave's power.*

He wondered if any of those warmongers realized the significance of that action.

The Brave was immensely powerful.

The rumours had been exaggerated to the point that it was an army of a thousand, but he began to believe that it was actually possible.

In truth, as he returned to the battlefield with his knights as reinforcements, Royce had seen the traces of an existence that far exceeded common sense.

The path had been burned to a crisp.

The burns were the result of a wide-area fire-attribute offensive spell.

Royce had seen the flames rise up to the sky as he retreated.

But despite receiving such an attack, Leticia returned, and not a hair on her head was touched.

Despite that, corpses of knights were strewn all over the path.

Only a few people had survived.<sup>[1]</sup>

A single girl had caused this result.

He had heard of the Brave's accomplishments during his time on the front lines, but he had never witnessed it in person.

He had believed that there was bound to be some exaggerations and distortions in the rumours.

But Royce couldn't help but shudder at the memory of having witnessed that power firsthand.

When Kelvin left with Wynn and Locke to scout out Doria Village, Royce was left alone with Leticia.

Leticia had transformed.

The face of a youthful maiden that she had worn while with Wynn

disappeared, replaced by an icy expression. She gave off an aura of inviolable sanctity that made her seem unapproachable.

It was exactly like the first time he had met Leticia.

As a Count, Royce had been to many parties and banquets.

He had been acquainted with nobles and royalty from not only the Empire, but also from other countries.

She had transformed into Leticia van Mavis the Brave, clad in the dignified air of a lady of nobility that belied a fierce spirit.

Royce had now seen how much of an influence the Knight Cadet known as Wynn Byrd had on the Brave.

The debate continued as Royce contemplated.

“We should let Mavis the Brave lead our army against Petersia.”

“Wait! The Brave did move to support the Empire during the coup and during this battle, but it is not certain that she will lend us her strength.”

“If we declare war and the Brave doesn’t lend us her strength, what then?”

“Oh? Are you implying that our esteemed Imperial Knights would lose to Petersia without the Brave’s help?”

“I didn’t mean it like that. Our courageous knights would never lose to the Petersian army.”

“Then there is no problem with declaring war. You have said so yourself.”

Prince Alfred raised his hands.

The bickering vassals stopped speaking and turned towards Alfred.

“I heard that there are rumours flying around that the Brave was at the battlefield. However, that is not possible. She was at my villa. It’s impossible for her to have been on the battlefield.”

“But there have been reports that it really was Brave Mavis. Some rumours say that she was seen acting with Count Elstead’s militia.”

“Are those not mere rumours? Count Elstead. Are these rumours true?”

Royce stood up as Prince Alfred looked towards him.

As he stood up, Royce heard murmurs all around him.

“That deserting coward...”

“Selfishly using the Brave’s power doesn’t change the fact that he tried to flee.”

Royce felt scornful gazes from all around him.

To the other nobles, he was just a former General who had been demoted to the rank of Lieutenant.

As Count, he had some influence, but to them, his demotion was proof that he was on the losing side of a power struggle.

Since he couldn’t take part in the Council through his military rank, he had to force his way in as a lord of the affected area. They only saw him as somebody who was desperately trying to regain his power in vain.

He himself didn’t deny those accusations.

Moreover, his bulging belly and outward appearance lent even more credence to those rumours.

Royce did not say anything about the rumours surrounding him.

If he were to be dismissed from the Imperial Court due to those rumours, he would consider it a blessing.

‘I have to look after my subordinates. I can’t just get framed and hole up in my territory.’

Royce sighed discretely.

“I was tasked with sheltering the commoners at the rear of the army. I would not have had the honour to work with the Brave.”

“You weren’t escorting commoners, you were deserting, were you not?”

Royce glanced at the source of the voice, and saw Marquis Welt van Cliffdorf.

“There were reports that you had used your militia to drive off an enemy force stationed at some village, but there were also reports that you had

actually stole the Brave's accomplishments."

"Oh? I am very interested in where you heard those reports, Marquis. I was ordered to escort the commoners by the late General Feyl. Somebody must have greatly misunderstood, if they thought I had fled. As for the enemies in that village, I had summoned my militia to drive them off so that I could protect the commoners. I am, after all, a coward. I prepared for every possible outcome. I was just blessed with the fact that I came across an enemy force while retreating. Also, the 'some village' you were talking about, happens to be a village in your territory, Doria Village. I do believe some thanks are in order for driving out an enemy force that was terrorizing your precious subjects."

"Tch... I am deeply thankful."

Welt clicked his tongue in annoyance.

"We will leave it at that, Count Elstead, Marquis Cliffdorf. There truly was an order signed by General Feyl ordering Count Elstead to retreat. He did not desert. Furthermore, the Brave stayed at the Royal Villa."

Alfred looked towards the nobles who had claimed that the Brave was at the battlefield.

"Do you have anything to add? Will you claim that I am lying?"

"No, I wouldn't presume to..."

"With all due respect, Your Highness. Even if she's the Brave, she is still a full-fledged noble of the Empire, with royal blood in her veins. If Your Highness were to order it, would she not have no alternative but to obey?"

"That should be the case. However, she has been consecrated by the Goddess Anastasia. We cannot force her to do anything. Duke Mavis, am I right?"

Alfred then turned to face Leticia's father, Duke Lecter van Mavis. Duke Mavis wore a sour expression.

"I am afraid so. Your Highness does not have a higher blessing than her."

"As I thought."

"If I may, Your Highness."

Welt once again spoke up.

“Even if the Brave will not proactively lend us her power, it does not make sense to not consider her as part of our military strength. If her country is in a crisis, she will still move to save it. That possibility can still act as a deterrence to other countries.”

“I also have one more thing to say. The army also has the Knight Cadet known as the Master of the Brave. He cannot disobey an order from the leaders of the Knight Order. We could always consider the possibility of ordering him to ask the Brave to lend us her power.”

“Ah, that is true.”

“I see. It is true that he cannot go against an order. And as his disciple, she cannot disobey her Master.”

Some of the nobles murmured in approval.

“At Your Highness’s command, I will immediately order that Knight Cadet to ask the Brave to lend us her power against Petersia. We shall show those Petersian dogs hell. Shall we?”

Welt gloated at Royce as he said that.

As a noble, he could also express his opinion, despite Welt’s higher rank.

However, as according to military ranks, he was a mere Lieutenant, while Welt was a Commander.[\[2\]](#)

He couldn’t object, nor speak up. He could only comply.

“Only Marquis Clifford could think of that action.”

“I can already imagine those Petersian whelps turning tail and fleeing upon seeing the Brave at the head of our Imperial Knight Order!”

Welt nodded in satisfaction at that exclamation of flattery, raising his hand in the air.

“Your Highness, at your command, I will lead the army with the Brave, and the Empire’s flag shall fly over Peterisa’s palace. Will it, and it shall be done!”

“Ah, about that, Marquis Clifford.”

Believing that everything was decided, Welt smiled at Alfred.

“I am sorry, but Knight Cadet Wynn Byrd has been reassigned.”

“Huh?”

“There’s a good reason behind this.”

After a stunned silence, the conference hall broke into an uproar.

---

“Ahaha, that was funny.”

“This is not a laughing matter, Your Highness. The criticism towards Cadet Byrd is growing stronger.”

The meeting had ended.

Only Alfred and Royce remained in the hall.

“I wonder, can we do anything to keep those warmongers in check?”

“At least they can no longer do as they please with Wynn Byrd.”

“He is still the Brave’s one and only weakness. We had to take preventative measures. Besides, you didn’t object, did you?”

“I personally would have liked to do it more cautiously.”

Royce sighed.

“Also, is that personnel selection really fine?”

“Ah, there won’t be any problems, I think”

“I would say that there is a mountain of problems. A commoner, and more importantly, a male knight, accompanying the princess?”

“The further away my little sister is from the aristocratic power struggles, the better. Moreover, it is also hard to make use of Cadet Byrd this way. In the first place, I wonder if those mongers understand what ‘deterrence’ means.”

—‘The Empire has prepared to use the Brave’s power for itself...’

That would be the opposite of deterrence.

Leticia’s power would allow them to defeat any country.

However, that was only if the enemy was only one country.

No matter which way they turned, they would be surrounded by potential enemies.

If they even appeared to try to use her power...

"In the first place, the Empire would be destroyed."

Alfred brought his hands together, his face relaxing.

"As her brother, don't you think I should give my little sister every chance she can get?"

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The Knight Order's headquarters was in the same place as the Knight School.

Wynn walked through the front gates with a big sigh.

Tiara had demanded that he change into his uniform.

That meant that what awaited him was something that he had to wear a uniform for. His heart sank upon that realization.

'I wonder why I was summoned. It might be some sort of reward from the fight a few days ago, but that wouldn't have anything to do with Princess Tiara. First of all, I'm only a Knight Cadet. They shouldn't need to call me to the Knight Order's headquarters in uniform like this.'

Moreover, if he were to receive a medal of honour, then he shouldn't be the only one summoned.

The Empire had suffered considerable losses due to the advance force being defeated by the Petersian army.

In the unlikely chance that he really was being promoted or honoured for his achievements, it would have been fine to notify him through Lieutenant Royce.

It had been two months since the Knight Academy was closed due to the shortage of knights.

Wynn's environment had completely changed since the school had closed down.

Rather, all of the students had experienced the changes.

Across the Remulshil Empire's northern border was the vast lands the Demon Lord had once ruled over.

Until the Brave finally slew the Demon Lord, humans and monsters fought endlessly in those lands, like a never-ending nightmare.

Most monsters, and of course, all demons, were physically superior to humans. In addition to that, lower-ranked monsters multiplied quickly. The Empire made heavy sacrifices to keep the demons at bay.

Even after the Demon Lord had been slain, the northern border still continued to suffer considerable damage from monster attacks.

Due to that, they couldn't reassign any of the elite knights guarding the northern border. As a result, the southern part of the Empire ended up shorthanded.

Because of that, the Empire had to enlist the students.

He checked in at the receptionist's desk, where the receptionist led him to a room upstairs.

Even though the Knight Academy was a part of the headquarters, Wynn had never been to the upper floors.

At most, he had only been to the first floor to turn in paperwork.

The former palace was adorned with ornate decorations on its pillars and murals on the wall, but unlike in the Knight Academy, many of the furnishings had been cleared away.

He was led to a remote room on that floor.

The door was made of a large piece of black oak. Wynn had never seen such an imposing door.

The words 'Aristocratic Guests' were written across the door.

"Umm... Is this really the right room?"

"It is. I was told to lead you to this room."

Wynn whirled around to face the woman who had led him, but she merely flashed a smile, then walked away.

Alone, Wynn stood there, intimidated by the imposing door.

‘What should I do? They won’t get angry if I open it, will they?’

Wynn was frozen in front of the door, but afraid of keeping the important person who had summoned him waiting, he gathered his resolve and knocked on the door.

“You may enter.”

Upon receiving permission to enter, Wynn pushed open the door with an “Excuse me.”

As he entered the room meant for welcoming guests of the Knight Order, he saw a portrait of a gallant knight mounted on a horse. The pommel of the knight’s sword, the knight’s shield and armour, were all made of gold and inset with precious jewels. The painting was clearly an extremely high-class item.

In the middle of the room, he saw four people around a large table, waiting for him.

Of the four, three of them were seated.

‘Hm? Lieutenant? Why are Cornelia and Princess Tiara also here?’

The only one standing was Lieutenant Royce, Wynn’s commanding officer.

Tiara nodded at him, while Cornelia made a small wave and smiled.

Upon seeing familiar faces, Wynn felt slightly more relieved.

“Knight Cadet Wynn Byrd, reporting.”

‘Hm? Who is the one sitting in the middle? I feel like I have seen him before...’

The young man seated in-between Cornelia and Tiara nodded solemnly in response to Wynn’s greeting.

His clothes looked similar to the Knight Order’s uniform, but was made of a thick white cloth. The white cloth was ornately embroidered with golden thread.

Only the Imperial Guards were allowed to wear the white uniform, and only a select few had theirs adorned with gold.

The man was sitting in the seat of honour. That meant that he was more important than Wynn's classmate, Cornelia, the first princess and the second-in-line to the throne, and the Great Sage, the Elven Princess Tiara.

That meant—

"Ah, stand at ease. This is not a formal meeting. Today, as the Remulshil Empire's Prince, I wanted to have a meeting with you, the Master of the Brave, Wynn Byrd."

That meant that this man was Alfred van Remulshil.

In a fluster, Wynn bowed down towards the prince.

"I would like to make you my sister's subordinate."

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### Translator Notes

1. I thought the goal was no survivors!? — [back](#)
2. Commander is bigger than General... I'm too lazy to retcon terminology... the terminology here is quite a mess anyways... — [back](#)

# Interlude

## Chapter 47: Adventurer Guild

The Adventurer's Guild.

Wherever there lived people, so too would be present a branch of the Guild, in the nearest town or city.

The Adventurer's Guild had its roots in a mercenary guild used by the Emeldia Sanctuary, a temple complex dedicated to worshipping the Creation Goddess Anastasia, to ward off foreign influences.

Emeldia eventually formed its own organization, the Templar Knights, which took over the mercenary guild's role. However, the demand for the mercenaries themselves continued throughout mankind's history as long as the fighting continued, and so, the mercenary guild continued to exist.

A divide grew between the mercenaries who only fought wars for a living, and others, like people who did odd jobs or treasure hunters who explored the ruins of ancient civilizations.

Eventually, some of them broke off from the mercenary guild to found a new organization.

That was the birth of the Adventurer's Guild.

As monsters caused more and more damage, the Adventurer's Guild quickly grew.

Since its members did not just fight in wars, but also fulfilled miscellaneous requests, it became a valuable institution to the countries ravaged by monsters.

To the commoners, the guild was the place where they could trust that any request they submitted would be fulfilled by an appropriate person.

To the nobility, the guild allowed them to divest their knights as defense against monsters, and apply them to more pressing matters.

Sometimes, the Guild would also receive requests regarding major problems from the country itself.

A gathering of diverse talents — that was the Adventurer's Guild.

Simurgh was the capital of the Remulshil Empire.

The Guild had four branches in the metropolis that was Simurgh. One in the northern part of the city, one in the southern part, one in the eastern part, and one in the western part.

And in front of the three-story high building that was the eastern branch, there stood two children.

A boy, and a girl.

Judging by their heights, the boy was a bit older than the girl.

However, the boy didn't seem to be even 10 years old.

The little boy pushed open the door, and entered the building.

“So this is the Adventurer's Guild...”

As he entered, he saw a large hall before him.

Right in front of him, he saw three receptionists dealing with both adventurers and their clients at the counter.

To his right were ten large round tables with six chairs each. Further in, he saw a bar, with 10 stools lined up along it.

On the wall, there were sheets of paper detailing various requests, affixed to a bulletin board.

To his left, all he saw were a set of stairs, and a small side door.

The boy encouraged the girl clinging timidly to his left arm as they made their way to the end of the line of people in front of the receptionists.

Several of the adventurers seated at the table, and also some of the people standing in line with them looked curiously at the two children.

The Adventurer's Guild did have children as members.

Some of them were children of other adventurers, while others were children

who lived in the slums around the city.

Unlike pickpocketing or burglary, becoming an adventurer was legal.

By joining the Adventurer's Guild, the kids could earn some small change taking odd jobs.

Most of the time, they would lose their limbs from injuries or even their lives in the process.

However, only a few of them were lucky enough to make a fortune.

'Someday, I might become a famous adventurer.'

Despite only a small minority of adventurers prospering, there was no end to the children who dreamed of such success.

Due to that, it wasn't strange to see children at the Adventurer's Guild.

However, the two children were especially young.

The boy did not seem like one of the children who dreamed of becoming an adventurer at all.

Both his shirt and trousers alike were covered with patches.

He would not seem out of place among the children from the slums.

On the other hand, the girl, who was trying desperately to seem invisible, stood out.

Anybody could see that her clothes were of high quality, as if it had come straight out of a picture book. She appeared frightened of the gazes gathered on her, but all those present could only imagine how pretty she would grow to become.

The two children eventually reached the front of the line.

"Hello, and welcome to the Adventurer's Guild."

The lady who was at the reception desk smiled at the nervous-looking children.

'I wonder which noble's request or company's request will be submitted?'

The receptionist, Lilia thought to herself as she observed the two children.

She assumed that the girl was the daughter some affluent person, while the boy was her servant.

“Umm... Miss, we would like to become adventurers.”

“Eh? You came to become adventurers!?”

Lilia let out an astonished voice.

She looked at their faces to make sure she had heard correctly.

The girl’s shoulders just barely reached the countertop.

Even for an adventurer’s child, she seemed rather young.

The youngest person to register as an adventurer was only around the boy’s age.

“Umm, How old are you two?”

“I am nine years old, and she is seven.”

Lilia was troubled.

They were so young.

Even children from the slums were about ten when they started working as adventurers.

In her three years working as a receptionist, she had never seen such young children want to register.

“Umm... Don’t you know that adventuring is really dangerous? It’s too early for you, much less this girl over here.”

Of course, not all of the work was dangerous, but she didn’t think such young children, especially the little girl, would be able to do the work.

The Guild valued its credibility.

If it failed to fulfill requests, its credibility would decrease.

Something else bothered her.

‘No matter how you think of it, that girl is from a well-off family. Is it fine for her to become an adventurer?’

If they wandered the streets, she might get kidnapped.

The girl was hiding behind the boy, so she could only see her face.

“It’s fine. Even though we look like this, we’ve already trained ourselves.”

‘No no no’

In her mind, she shook her head.

‘Just give up, please...’

At that moment, she heard the voice of a young Adventurer from the door.

“What is it, Lilia?”

“Oh? Aren’t these the two brats from The Roost?”

“Paul, do you know these kids?”

The eighteen-year-old Paul had finally graduated from being a novice Adventurer.

“Yeah, I don’t think there is anybody who stays at The Roost that doesn’t know who they are.”

Paul called out to Lilia, his crush, with a delighted expression.

But he soon frowned.

‘Even though they’re just brats, they’re quite quick.’

After he had woken up, Paul had made his way from the Wandering Bird’s Roost to the Adventurer’s Guild through a back alley.

On the way there, he had seen the two kids at the inn’s backyard swinging around wooden swords as they did every morning.

When he first saw them, he thought to himself: ‘How nice, for them to be so lively this early in the morning.’ But upon looking closer, he was surprised at how deftly they handled the swords and their bodies.

‘Could they be faster than... Nope, nope. No way that’s true!’

Paul shook his head, getting a puzzled look from Lilia.

“Ah, isn’t it fine to let them just register? Apart from the little girl here, that boy can handle some work.”

He made a suggestion.

“Fine. Can you write your own name?”

“I can.”

Most of the kids from the slums couldn’t write.

But the boy wrote his own name neatly on the documents he was given.

All he had to fill out was his name and age.

Since many adventurers didn’t have a fixed residence, that was not required.

“Wynn Byrd. So you’re Wynn.”

As Lilia scanned over the documents, she felt a tug on her sleeve.

“Leti also wants to do it!”

The girl exclaimed, while standing on the tip of her toes to reach as far as she could.

“Umm... It’s a bit too early for you, young lady.”

“I wanna register!”

She had just been hiding behind the boy, behind Wynn’s back, but was now tugging on Lilia’s sleeve as hard as she could.

“Miss, Leti has also been training with me, so it’s fine.”

In resignation, Lilia took out another registration sheet and handed it to the girl who called herself Leti.

“Are you also able to write?”

“I learned it from Onii-chan”

Shakily, she wrote the letters L, E, T, I onto the form.

“Please wait a moment.”

With a sigh, Lilia stood up.

She took out two plates from a locked box, and handed one to each of them.

“These are your registration cards. You have registered in the Simurgh’s eastern branch of the Guild. It also serves as your identification, so please take

care not to lose it.”

Lilia proceeded to explain the work of the Adventurer’s Guild in an easy to understand manner for the two children.

As a novice, they couldn’t accept requests from the bulletin board, and instead, they had to take jobs that the Guild assigned them.

Only when the Guild acknowledged that a novice was ready would they be able to take requests from the board.

The guild card could also serve as identification papers.

To adventurers without a permanent residence, the proof of identity was important. However, on the off chance that an adventurer inconvenienced the Guild by committing a crime, then not only would the adventurer have to pay a fine, but in serious cases, the Guild might send an assassin after them.

‘Do these kids really get it?’

Wynn was nodding with a contemplative expression. Leti, on the other hand, had a blank expression on her face. Whenever Wynn nodded, she would follow suit. [\[1\]](#)

‘These kids definitely do not get it.’

She was sure of it.

“Let’s start with some simple jobs.”

After finishing her explanation, Lilia took out a book listing the available requests and opened it in front of them.

---

“Hello!”

“Hi!”

Two young adventurers, Wynn and Leti, greeted Lilia cheerfully.

“Yeah, hello.”

‘These kids sure are enthusiastic.’

The kids did even better than Lilia had expected.

Wynn and Leti only went to the Guild a few days in the past month, but they completed the work reliably.

Despite her worries, they almost never made any blunders.

Their work mainly consisted of errands that couldn't be described as an "adventure".

They did jobs like searching for lost items, or weeding at a rich merchant's mansion.

Most novice adventurers would say stuff like "Don't make me do that sort of stuff," or "Get a servant to do that."

However, such jobs weren't trivial errands.

By completing such jobs faithfully, one could form connections with the influential people who requested such jobs.

Through those connections, they might get designated requests from nobles or other merchants, which provide great benefits.

Such influential people might even become sponsors of the Adventurer's Guild.

That is why the Guild assigned such jobs to novice adventurers.

Other jobs included cleaning the streets, cleaning the aqueducts at the center of the town, and working at construction sites.

By doing such jobs, novice adventurers would improve their dexterity and stamina, while gaining connections and improving their information gathering skills.

"Is there work for us?"

"Hmm... let me see."

Leti was standing at the counter on the tip of her toes, only her head poking up above the counter. Lilia stroked Leti's soft hair while opening up the book of requests in front of Wynn.

"... Guarding a chicken coop?"

"Yes."

Lilia spread open the map of the capital and its surroundings.

Simurgh was enclosed by solid ramparts.

The slums were bordering the outer wall, just beyond those were various plantations, and past the plantation were fertile grasslands.

Lilia pointed to a place in that area.

“The request came from a farm in these plains. It seems that the chicken coop and fields suffered quite a bit of damage.”

“Was it caused by an animal like a wolf?”

“It seems that is still unknown, but...”

Noticing Wynn’s eyes lighting up, Lilia paused.

She saw that he was itching to leave, she thought to herself: ‘Oops!’

“... Um, you know that it’s only keeping guard, right?”

“Huh? We don’t get to defeat the culprit?”

“All you have to do is find out what is destroying the fields.”

It was outrageously expensive to hire an experienced adventurer for a long period of time.

Due to that, it was better to hire novice adventurers to investigate the situation first.

Only then would they hire a suitable adventurer with another request..

“It’s dangerous, so you can’t. Let other adventurers defeat the culprit that is wrecking the fields.”

“... But we’re also adventurers.”

“You brats are gonna take a newbie request, right? How bout I go with y’all?”

“Oh, Paul. Good morning.”

Hearing the conversation between Wynn and Lilia, Paul called out to them.

During his time as a novice adventurer, Paul had taken many newbie requests.

As a sign of his having graduated from being a rookie, the Guild

recommended Paul for a designated request.

“How about it, Lilia? If I party with these kids here, I don’t think they will be in danger.”

Blushing slightly, Paul made a suggestion.

“Is it livestock like cattle and sheep being attacked?”

“No, it’s chickens and rabbits.”

“Then it’s most likely a weasel, fox or some sort of stray dog. If it’s only a few of them, then I can drive them off myself.”

“I see... Are you alright with it, Wynn?”

“I’m fine with going with Paul.”

“Well, with me in the party, their portion of the rewards becomes smaller. But if we do drive away the culprit, the bonus should make up for it.”

“Then I leave them to you, Paul.”

“Ah, okay! Leave it all to me!”

Paul confidently pounded his chest.

Paying no attention to Paul, Lilia once again looked at the map.

The farm where the request came from was a bit close to the forest in the outskirts of the capital.

‘I hope that it’s just some forest animals...’

After telling Randell, the owner of the Wandering Bird’s Roost, that he wouldn’t be back that night, the three adventurers set off.

They passed through the outer city gate and arrived at the ramshackle collection of crude huts — the slums.

The slums were inhabited by those too poor to pay the entry toll, and refugees from other areas.

Inevitably, the crime rate was high.

Paul warned the two kids to never let themselves out of his sight.

Leti was especially at risk.

She clearly stood out in her high-class clothes.

She was an attractive target for kidnapping.

Seemingly unaware of the dangers the place held, Leti was skipping around happily.

Worried that she would get lost the moment he let his eyes off of her, Wynn held on to Leti tightly.

While keeping an eye on the two kids, Paul tried to intimidate the group of people who were eyeing them.

The people were carrying rusted daggers and knives

Even if he was a rookie, attacking a trained adventurer would be risky for them.

If he remained vigilant, he shouldn't be attacked.

Eventually, the crudely built huts became replaced by open fields as they arrived at the plantation area.

Paul and Wynn sighed simultaneously, looked at each other, then broke out into laughter.

“What is it?”

Leti looked up, finding it strange that they both started laughing.

“It’s nothing.”

Wynn answered while patting her head.

“Sheesh, we haven’t even began the request.”

Paul took a sip of the canteen hanging from his waist, then offered it to Wynn.

It was filled with fruit juice.

It was a bit warm, but it still tasted great.

“Leti wants some too!”

Wynn gave her the canteen.

"You two aren't actually siblings right?"

"We're not. Leti is a friend."

"A friend, huh. How nice. I also wanna walk like that with Lilia"

Grumbling softly while rubbing Wynn's head, Paul looked around them.

Endless fields extended all the way to the horizon, and off in the distance, he could spy the overgrown forest.

In the setting sun, he saw the silhouettes of shepherds guiding their sheep.

"I don't think we'll reach our destination before the sun sets. Hey Wynn, get Leti to keep moving!"

Leti had stopped to look at some flowers on the roadside that had caught her interest.

Wynn pulled on Leti's arm as she continued to stare at the flowers.

"Sigh, Lilia was the one who recommended the request, so it should be safe, but why do I feel uneasy?"

Paul's thought were reflected on his face as he watched Leti enthusiastically tell Wynn about the flowers she had seen.

'Come to think of it, she did tell her family about this, right?'

Leti clearly belonged to an upper-class family.

'If an outsider saw this, wouldn't it look like I was kidnapping a girl from a rich family?'

He was struck by anxiety as he walked behind the two children.

Then, his worry immediately came true.

"Eeeeek! A kidnapper!!"

"It's not what it looks like!"

They had arrived at the requesters's small cottage.

The girl who was waiting for them took one look at them. Her smile froze, and she shrieked. Paul hastily cried out in response.

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## Translator Notes

1. Trivia: pokan face -> blank expression (ポカーンとした顔 if ya wanna google it) — [back](#)

# Chapter 48: The Work Begins

“I’m sorry for yelling so loudly.”

The requester was a woman in her mid-twenties named Laura. After realizing that Paul wasn’t a kidnapper, Laura invited the three into her home.

At her feet, a brown sheepdog observed the three adventurers vigilantly, its ears standing straight up.

But once Laura, its owner, invited them in, it trotted over to the fireplace inside, where a fire was flickering, and laid down.

They had arrived at about dinnertime, and Laura had been making dinner.

She was making chicken stew with vegetables harvested from the fields.

The smell wafting from the pot simmering over the fireplace stimulated their appetite.

Having been startled by the shriek Laura had let out when they first met, Leti was hiding behind Wynn’s back while eyeing the pot.

“You haven’t had dinner, right? Why don’t you eat with me? You are helping us with keeping guard, after all.”

“Huh? Is it alright? We do have some food with us, you know?”

“Don’t hold back. I made a whole pot of stew, but it’s too much for Auntie to finish by herself..”

“Wynn, let’s take her offer.”

Wynn’s stomach had been growling

The hard bread and dried jerky could not compare to the chicken vegetable stew.

Wynn and Leti sat down beside the fireplace, and started to eat out of the small wooden bowls and spoons that Laura served.

“Be careful, it’s hot.”

“Okay!”

Blowing on it as they ate, they enjoyed the warmth of the hot stew.

“Ugh... it’s hot.”

“Leti, just wait for it to cool down a bit before eating.”

For a while, Wynn and Leti were engrossed in eating their meals.

“I thank you again for giving us some food.”

“It’s fine. I once had kids their age. Since they’re still growing, I unconsciously ended up making a bit too much.”

Laura smiled upon seeing Wynn, who had emptied his bowl, holding it out for seconds. Paul filled the bowl with stew.

There was a generous helping of chicken in the stew, so it was delicious.

‘If only there was some alcohol here,’ Paul thought.

“I’m happy that this pretty young lady likes it. Her clothes looked so luxurious, I was worried that it wouldn’t suit her tastes.”

“Not at all, it’s really yummy!”

This was a feast compared the the potage with increased volume made by putting bread flour in it that she normally had.

‘Wynn aside, even Leti’s appetite is still going strong, huh,’ Paul thought

She was a young lady from an affluent family, and yet, despite the fact it wasn’t haute cuisine, she devoured the food in front of her without stopping.

“You shouldn’t put too much food in your mouth at once.”

Wynn warned Leticia, who was trying to cram as much food as she could into her mouth. He then looked around the room.

Apart from Laura and the dog, which was gnawing on a chunk of meat that Laura had given to him, he didn’t see any other people living here.

“Are you the only one living here, Auntie?”

For a moment, Laura was silent, her eyes cast downwards.

“Back when my husband and child were alive, our whole family lived here... but now, the rest of my family lives in the capital.”

Laura’s family lived in the capital. She only had her parents, her husband and her child, but her husband and child had succumbed to illness last year.

“In order to protect the land that my husband left behind, my parents and I take turns staying the night here.”

There was a solemnness in Laura’s face as she thought of her departed family members.

Paul cleared his throat, trying to change the subject.

“Umm, so what in particular has been damaged?”

“The chickens, eggs, and fields have all been affected.”

“Has any livestock been harmed?”

“Not at all.”

“I see.”

‘It doesn’t seem to be a wolf or demonic beast. It is most likely a fox or weasel, but it could also be a fiend.’

“Have there been any sounds, such as animal cries?”

Wynn stopped eating to ask Laura.

“I don’t thi— Ah!”

Laura, who had been thinking about the question, widened her eyes.

“Come to think of it, sometimes, some mushrooms and herbs are left in front of the chicken coop.”

“Really!?”

Paul and Wynn exchanged glances.

“Does it always happen the night the incidents occur?”

“Yes, it was at the exact same time. At the same time something stole the chickens and eggs, they’re left there.”

“Actually, today’s stew was also made from those mushrooms and herbs,” Laura said nonchalantly.

Unlike Laura, Paul was deep in thought.

‘Could it have been a human that did it?’

If the culprit left behind such items, that ruled out the possibility that it was a monster or an animal.

It had to be the work of an intelligent being.

“Does anybody around here know that we adventurers would be coming by today?”

“Apart from my parents, nobody.”

‘If the culprit is somebody who lives nearby, or somebody from the slums, then it would be good if they didn’t know we’re here.’

“Wynn, when you finish eating, shall we take a look at the chicken coop?”

“Got it.”

“Eh? Leti also wants to go with Onii-chan!”

Gulping down the remaining stew from the bowl, Wynn vigorously stood up.

In response, Leti also stood up, but...

“Leti, it would be disrespectful to Laura to leave food behind.”

Wynn warned her.

“But...”

“In the first place, Leti has to stay here and guard the house.”

If, by chance, the culprit was from the slums...

Paul looked on as Wynn tried to persuade Leti, who was puffing her cheeks out in dissatisfaction.

Anybody could tell that she was from an affluent household from her clothes, which would make her the primary target for kidnapping.

“If she got kidnapped... my head would roll...”

“But Leti is also an adventurer!”

“Oh, so this girl here was also an adventurer?”

After Wynn left the hut, Leti cried out. Laura looked at her with admiration.

“Yep, I may look small, but I can still drive away animals, for sure.”

“Hmm... these brats practicing swordplay is quite dangerous.”

They weren’t merely swinging around wooden swords, pretending to be knights.

From the way they swung their wooden swords, even an adult would be out of breath after a few swings.

But the two children whirled around, quickly trading blows, as if they were performing a sword dance.

Moreover, the Guild wouldn’t have assigned them the job for no reason.

“If my child was still alive, she would be around Leti’s age, wouldn’t she?.”

Hearing Laura’s lonely mumble, Paul looked back at Leti.

““Leti?”

“What’s wrong?”

They noticed Leti was acting strangely.

---

The sun had set as he ate dinner.

Using a piece of firewood from the fireplace as a torch, Wynn walked around the chicken coop.

The chickens in the coop were woken up by the approaching light, and began to rustle around.

‘Nope, I don’t see anything.’

He inspected the ground around the coop, but couldn’t find any possible clues.

‘The soil of the fields are soft, so there might be footprints there...’

Wynn closely examined the fields.

“Found something!”

There were many footprints left on a ridge in the soil.

The footprints came from several different people, but some of them might belong to Laura and her parents.

Among them, Wynn found a set of small footprints that appeared to belong to a child.

Given that Laura’s child had passed away, it was likely that the owner of those footprints was the culprit.

Unsurprisingly, when he followed the footsteps, they led towards a stream in the plains beyond the fields.

It was one of the tributaries of the river that flowed from the northeastern part of the city to the southeastern part of the city.

Upstream was a thick forest that looked was shrouded in gloom in the setting sun.

‘It’s dangerous to go there alone...’

Wynn confirmed again that the footsteps were leading away from the fields towards the stream, then rushed back to the cottage.

“Paul!”

He flung open the door, then ran inside.

Immediately, Paul and Laura shushed him.

He then saw Leti nodding off in the corner of the room.

Wynn nodded in understanding, then softly walked over to Paul.

“Did Leti fall asleep?”

“Yeah, although she was awake until just now. Is she always like that?”

“What’s wrong?”

For some reason, Paul seemed weird.

“Well, right after you left, she became strange...”

When Wynn left, Leti became completely expressionless, as if all emotion had left her.

She looked exactly like a doll.

She then sat in a corner of the room, and no matter how much Paul and Laura talked to her, she didn't respond.

They were baffled, but eventually, due to having eaten her fill, Leti dozed off.

That was right when Wynn returned.

"You also surprised me. Who is Leti's family, exactly?"

"Umm... well, she isn't like that when she's with me. I also don't know who her family is."

"Okay... Even though she seems like a lady from a well-off family, there hasn't been a fuss about how she hasn't returned. She doesn't seem to be treated well..."

'Could she have been an illegitimate child...?'

"What I wanted to say, was that there were some strange footprints that led beyond the fields, away from the cottage."

"Well done, Wynn."

"What do we do about Leti?"

"We have to guard the house tonight, so let's let her sleep in here."

Paul looked at Laura to make sure it was fine.

"That's fine. I wonder if something happened to this girl? She seemed frightened of me..."

Leti had curled up on the bed.

The sheepdog had also curled up beside her.

Laura took out a blanket to let Leti sleep soundly.

Wynn took the blanket from Laura and laid it over Leti's small body.

He then took a moment to arrange Leti's blonde hair, which had been disheveled by her sleeping posture.

"Without you, Wynn, Leti seems quite helpless. You have to protect her well, you hear?"

Wynn nodded firmly, and then left the cottage, out to where Paul was waiting for him.

## Chapter 49: Sky

They decided that Paul would keep watch throughout the night, while Wynn and Leti would keep watch at dawn. The three hid behind the chicken coop, enduring the smell of the chickens, so that they would not be seen from the fields.

Paul, wrapped in a blanket, had been watching the fields intently. Suddenly, he gave Wynn, who was sleeping beside him, a shake.

"Somebody came... Hey, wake up. And wake Leti, too. We have a 'guest' to welcome."

Wynn came to at once. He proceeded to gently wake the girl up.

Wynn then copied Paul and peeked around the corner of the chicken coop.

Sure enough, he saw the silhouette of a person in the fields.

They hadn't brought any lamps in order to avoid giving themselves away, but luckily, the night sky was bright enough for them to see that it was a human.

'So it really was a kid from the slums...'

Judging by the size of the figure, the person appeared to be around Leti's age.

Was he stealing vegetables from the fields because he wasn't able to get enough food to eat?

Crawling on all fours, Leti peeked out from under Wynn. Wynn glanced at her thoughtfully.

'Anyway, if that's the case, then I don't understand why the footprints stopped...'

---

The previous evening, Wynn and Paul had left the sleeping Leti in the cottage. Wynn led Paul to where he had discovered the footprints.

"Well done, Wynn."

As expected, Paul saw that there was a set of small footprints on the ground.

“The footprints lead to the river. I considered following them further, but I decided that it would be best not to go alone.”

“Yeah, your judgement was correct.”

The two of them traced the footprints back to the river. Passing through the plains, they came upon a small hill. The footprints continued over the hill.

“It leads away from Simurgh.”

“That’s right... He might have circled around the hill and followed the river to the slums in order to avoid being discovered. Or maybe there’s a nearby village, and some brat was the thief.”

“Is there a village around here?”

“There are villages scattered all around the city.”

They could see the gently flowing river water from the top of the so-called ‘hill’.

The river was too wide to cross without a bridge.

“The footprints are getting farther apart. They must have started running.”

The small footprints were heading straight towards the river. Wynn swiftly followed the footprints. As Paul followed after him, he thought, ‘At least that part of him is still child-like.’

“Ah.”

Wynn cried out in confusion.

“What is it?”

“The footprints stopped...”

When Paul caught up to Wynn, he saw that the footprints truly had stopped several meters away from the riverbank.

“Can you see any other footprints elsewhere?”

“What do you mean?”

In the torchlight, the two of them combed the surrounding area carefully, but were unable to find any other clues.

---

‘If we went after it now, we could catch it, but...’

If they didn’t know how it had disappeared in the first place, it would be dangerous to carelessly make a move.

It could be a monster with that sort of ability, even if Paul had never heard of such a monster.

A monster that was only able to steal vegetables and eggs wouldn’t be that strong.

Still, if he just let it get away, he wouldn’t be able to give a proper report to the adventurers who were going to subjugate the monster.

Information was money.

He would get an extra reward if he could provide information useful to the subjugation.

“Let’s chase after the thief!”

Wynn and Leti nodded in assent.

The small figure probably intended to steal from the day’s harvest before walking unsteadily away from the fields.

It seemed to be headed towards the hill, as expected.

When the thief was halfway across the field, the three of them left their hiding spot.

In order to avoid being noticed, they crouched down and chased after the figure’s silhouette.

When they reached the field, they could see that the thief’s loot was a head of cabbage.

Cabbages could be eaten in soup or preserved with salt and spices.

On top of a large leaf where the cabbage had been planted, they found some moss that was good for making salves.

“He’s almost over the hill. Hurry up!”

The thief’s unsteady gait wasn’t fast, but he had nearly reached the top of the hill.

Eventually, the small figure reached the top.

Then, it paused for a moment before running down the other side of the hill, heading towards the river.

“Run!”

Paul hissed. The three of them started running.

Due to their early morning training, Wynn and Leti easily overtook Paul. They reached the top of the hill.

Suddenly—

“Wha—?”

On the thief’s back, they saw a pair of pure-white wings glistening in the moonlight. With several powerful flaps of his wings, the thief’s body floated into the sky.

“It’s an Avian... I’ve only read about them in books.”

(TL: the kanji for this is literally “wing+human”)

Wynn murmured.

Avians were a race that lived near mountains and forests.

Their defining feature was a pair of wings that sprouted from their backs. Other than that, they didn’t differ much from humans.

“Why is one of them here?”

Avians had enormous magic power, to the point that they were one of the races that some humans in certain regions idolized.

Unfortunately, due to the catastrophic damage they had suffered from the demons in ancient times, their numbers had diminished.

There were rumours of a handful of villages that did interact with them, though.

“I get it. They used the hill to get a running start in order to take off. The mystery behind the footprints has been cleared up. That’s good.”

“I guess it’s impossible to chase after them.”

“I wonder if the adventurers from the Guild will even believe that the culprit was an Avian.”

Still dumbfounded, Wynn and Paul resignedly exchanged words.

They had encountered a semi-legendary being who had flown away, out of their reach.

It seemed to be headed to the forest upstream.

Even if they wanted to chase after it, it had already flown across the river.

“Would it have been fine if we had caught up to it more quickly?”

“But from what I’ve read, Avians are really strong.”

“...But was the thief strong enough to be idolized?”

The thief’s body was small, so even if it was an Avian, it was probably still a child.

If they captured the child though, there was the possibility that an adult Avian might come to retrieve the child.

“What’s wrong?”

Leti curiously looked on as she watched Wynn and Paul endlessly discuss the issue.

“Aren’t we going to chase after the flying person?” Leti asked.

“Even if we chased after the thief, it’s kind of hard to, since they’re flying,” replied Paul.

“I guess we have to catch the thief when they come back.”

“But even if we tried to catch it, isn’t it gonna fly away?”

“Maybe we could lay a trap.”

“But if we do that, what will you do if you get injured? I think we should leave it to the veteran adventurers.”

“Huh? We can catch it ourselves. Even if we told Randy, tomorrow is his day off.”

(TL: I have no idea who this Randy person is. I’m assuming a character was renamed, but I’ll leave it like this for now.)

“Aren’t we chasing after them?”

Leti asked once again.

“Flying aside, if we pursue them while it’s this dark...”

Wynn answered Leti's questions in place of Paul, who was still lost in thought. The river was quite wide.

Even though the river wasn't flowing rapidly, they didn't know how deep the water was.

It would be too dangerous to cross it in the dark.

"Then, we just have to fly, right?"

"What?"

Wynn wasn't sure if he had heard Leti correctly.

Paul also turned towards Leti.

"It's fine if we can fly, right, Onii-chan?"

Leti repeated herself.

At that moment, they felt a gentle breeze against their faces.

Leti smiled jubilantly at Wynn.

Paul was enthralled by her smile.

It was completely different from the expression she had made when Wynn left to look for clues by himself.

Leti's doll-like face looked like an artist's impression of a spirit. The unearthly beauty of her smile seemed fleeting.

The moonlight seemed to be gathering around Leti's feet.

Upon looking closer, it was Leti's body that was giving off light.

Paul rubbed his eyes to make sure what he was seeing was real. Suddenly, he felt weightless.

““Whoa!!””

Their bodies floated up into the night sky.

# Chapter 50: In the Avian Village (Part 1)

‘Hey, wait a minute, wa-wait a minute! Are we seriously flying right now? This is dangerous!!’

Wynn, Leti, and Paul flew through the moonlit sky.

‘W-we’re not gonna fall right? I could die. I will definitely die if we fall.’

The three of them were surrounded by a thin, translucent membrane resembling a giant soap bubble.

Beneath their feet, the river stretched across the plains like a black sash.

“Ahaha! Isn’t this cool, Onii-chan?”

“It’s really cool, Leti!”

Unlike Paul, who was flailing around helplessly, the two children laughed mirthfully.

“We have to chase after them without them noticing. Can you do that, Leti?”

“Okay.”

Leti nodded, and the bubble rose higher into the sky.

“N-no way...”

Paul let out a cry of disbelief.

He didn’t know much about magic.

However, he did know that this defied common sense.

Some adventurers could use magic.

Many of them were either former nobles or knights whose lords had fallen in battle.

Commoners didn’t have the opportunity to read magic books, but most adventurers could pay a moderate sum of money to learn how to cast simple spells, like lighting a fire.

That was why Paul had seen magic being used.

Paul had only seen rudimentary spells being used, but he doubted that magic could be cast as simply as Leti made it seem.

“D-did Leti do this? Leti can use magic!?”

“Now that I think about it, how long have you been able to fly like this, Leti?”

“Ummm... Just now?”

Leti tilted her head.

“I was like: ‘I wonder if I could fly,’ and I did.”

“Leti really does have a talent for magic!”

“Eh? But, Leti wants to be a knight, like Onii-chan!”

“I-is this really fine? We’re not going to fall, right? Right?!”

“It’s fine, it’s fine!”

Wynn put both of his hands against the bubble and looked down at the ground.

‘He must also be a big shot, huh?’

Cold sweat poured down Paul’s back like a waterfall, making his shirt uncomfortably wet.

He kneaded his temples and forced himself to smile.

He could do nothing but smile.

He slowly regained his calm.

The uncomfortable floating feeling didn’t go away, but it was silly for him to be the only one panicking.

“...First of all, take care not to be seen.”

There was no point in flailing around.

After all, he couldn’t do anything about it; also, when would be the next time he could fly in the sky like this?

That was why he decided to just enjoy it.

After calming down, he looked around.

He was closer to the moon and the clouds than ever before.

He could see bright lights in the distance. That was probably Simurgh.

The river that flowed through Simurgh was glistening in the moonlight. The main road looked like a thick, white line that extended from the gate, through the plains and forests, and off into the distance.

He looked down to see that the ground below them had turned from a grassy plain into a black mass of trees.

'Dang. I'm not gonna stop adventuring if I can experience stuff like this!'

Paul was still an adventurer at heart.

He thirsted for the unknown, and enjoyed the thrill of discovery.

---

Somewhere in the forest, there was a small spring in a clearing.

There were several wooden structures that appeared to be houses. However, most of them seemed to have burnt down, leaving only charred pillars in their place.

Forest weeds had started to grow in the ruined fields.

It was the very definition of a ghost town.

Strangely, there wasn't a single road leading out of the village.

Only a small stream of water from the fountain flowed away from the village.

A small avian girl slipped through a gap between the pillars, into one of the crumbling houses that had survived the fire. She was careful to avoid catching her wings on the pillars.

It was barely wide enough to be considered a room.

Only a sliver of moonlight slipped through the cracks of the crumbling wall to illuminate the room.

She had been living there for a few days, so her hair and wings were grey from the ashes.

The girl crouched in a corner of the room and bit into the precious cabbage.

She had stolen it from one of the nearby human settlements.

It had been several months since she had ended up alone. At first, she had eaten the food that remained in the fields, but that had quickly run out.

Then she had wandered the forest in search of food.

Nuts, plants, mushrooms, anything.

Due to the longevity of avians, it would be hard to judge her actual age, but she was as young as she looked.

In her limited knowledge, there were few things she could safely eat.

She had heard from the adults that there was a human settlement downstream.

The village might have been remote, but it wasn't isolated.

The adults of her village often flew to the human villages and hid their wings to buy various goods.

That was why she knew that there was food there, where humans lived.

One day, after being unable to find food for several days, she had spread her wings and left the forest.

She had seen a large field, and also a house with chickens, pigs and sheep. It was food.

She couldn't take the larger animals, but chickens were small enough to carry. So were the vegetables and eggs.

She knew that she was doing something bad.

She had stealthily crept towards the chicken coop and timidly stuffed two eggs into her pockets.

On her way back, she had seen ripened melons, so she had quickly plucked one. She ate the eggs raw and smashed the melon into the ground so that she could greedily devour its contents.

The melon's sweetness had filled her mouth, causing tears to flow from her eyes.

From that day, the girl, unable to hold back her appetite, increased the number of trips to that house.

She felt guilty, so she sometimes left behind nuts and mushrooms that she had found in the forest.

Even though she was young, she knew not to be seen when doing something bad.

That was why—

“Foound them!”

When she saw a human boy's smiling face peek out from behind the pillar, the cabbage she was nibbling on fell from her mouth, and she broke into tears.

---

“How terrible.”

They had chased the Avian girl to the hidden village of the Avians.

It had clearly been attacked.

Judging by the vegetation encroaching upon the village, it had probably been

about half a year since the village had been ruined.

The crops had all withered, and there were rotten fruits laying uneaten.

“Foound them!”

As Paul surveyed the ruined village, Wynn called out.

Paul ran over to the half-ruined house where Leti stood and peeked in through the gap between the pillars.

“In here?”

Leti nodded.

The gap was barely wide enough to let a child’s body through.

“Hey Wynn. What’s it like inside? Who’s in there?”

“It’s just a single girl!”

“I can’t come in. Can you bring her out?”

“Sure.”

Paul deciding that carelessly moving the pillars might cause them to collapse, and he waited for Wynn to come out.

“Alright.”

Wynn crawled out from the gap.

“Hey, it’s alright now, please come out.”

The girl crawled out after Wynn.

Her clothes were ragged from being caught on tree branches. Her unkempt hair and wings were dirty.

Even a child from the slums would have been cleaner.

However, that thought soon left his mind.

‘Oh, it really is an avian!’

Paul was elated to see an avian, something that he had only known through stories and rumors.

They were beings on the same level as High Elves, and in some places, they were idolized.

The girl, a semi-mythical avian, was hugging a half-eaten cabbage preciously

and sobbing as Wynn and Leti stood around her.

“Are you alright? Are you hurt?”

She looked to be the same age as Leti, so he patted her head.

Paul let out a sigh.

It just wouldn’t feel right to question such a young girl about the thefts.

Rather, he was shocked at her living conditions.

However, there was something he had to ask.

“So, could you tell us what happened?”

Paul drew closer to the girl, trying to ask her about her circumstances.

The girl backed away from him with a frightened squeal.

Paul scratched his head.

“Hmm... Let’s talk in a calmer place. Leti, can you fly us to Laura’s house?”

“I think I can.”

“Then, we’ll talk more there. Also, I would like to do something about this girl’s clothes. Then—”

“There’s something coming!”

Wynn interrupted Paul.

Wynn held the wooden sword that normally hung on his waist with both hands.

Paul noticed what Wynn was referring to.

The air felt colder, more menacing.

With their backs to the ruined house, Wynn and Paul stepped forward to protect the two girls.

‘What did we get ourselves into!?’

At that thought, something jumped out of the rustling bushes.

“Hah, hah, hah, eek...”

The avian girl let out a feeble cry in between short breaths.

“It’s fine. Onii-chan will beat it!”

Leti comforted the girl.

Wynn stood between the monster and the two girls.

“Wynn, you can’t do it. Let me do it!.”

The monster was a bit larger than a child. It had dark skin and a horn on its forehead.

It wore primitive clothes and held a rusty sword.

It was the fiend known as a goblin.

Goblins reproduced quickly, and lived in groups centered around a Goblin Lord. Due to their high reproductive rates and the fact that many groups settled near human villages, goblins caused a lot of damage to humans.

They were not particularly strong, as indicated by their size, and pretty much every adventurer would be able to defeat a single goblin.

That included Paul.

“Uooooooooo!”

Paul swung his sword with a shout.

The goblin leapt backwards.

The goblin eyed Paul and the children while staying outside of Paul’s range.

“Haaaaah!”

Paul swung his sword sideways.

Their swords smashed against each other. The goblin stumbled backwards from the force of Paul’s blow.

Paul was not yet a full-fledged adventurer, so his swordsmanship was still rough.

He used his full strength for every blow. However, Paul’s crude swordsmanship slowly wore down the goblin’s stamina.

Even monsters were made of flesh and blood.

Paul’s sword began to actually hit the goblin

The bleeding goblin’s movements slowly became duller.

‘Okay, now to finish it off!’

Judging that it was at its limit, Paul prepared to make the finishing blow.

“Uooooooooo!”

With a shout, he swung his sword — through thin air.

“What!?”

The goblin leapt to the side. Enduring its wounds, it ran past Paul.

“Shoot!”

He hadn’t realized that he had ended up straying quite far away from the house.

He had been so focused on chasing after the goblin and showering it with attacks that he had forgotten to stay close to the house.

The goblin ran with the last of its strength.

It sprinted straight for Leti and the Avian girl.

It aimed for easier prey, two helpless-looking girls.

Paul couldn’t run after it in time, due to the recoil from his slash.

“Shit!”

The goblin was only a few meters away from the girls.

The goblin raised its rusty sword as it leapt at them.

Suddenly, the goblin let out a loud shriek.

He had finally seen Wynn in front of the girls, with his wooden sword pointed upwards.

Just as the goblin leapt at the girls, Wynn stabbed at the goblin’s throat from the side.

The goblin tumbled over the ground.

Paul then ran over and finished it off by slashing its unprotected stomach.

## Chapter 51: In the Avian Village (Part 2)

Bam! Bam! Bam!

Laura heard the sound of furious knocking on the door, so she got up from her bed. When she opened the door, she saw the three adventurers she had hired. The party was made up of a boy and girl who were not even ten years old, and a teenage boy.

“How did it go? Oh, that child—”

She saw a little girl hiding behind Wynn and Leti, shivering in fear. Laura immediately guessed that the girl was the thief they had been looking for.

“Please, enter.”

She invited them in. Her eyes widened for a moment upon seeing the wings on the girl’s back. The three children entered, but Paul stayed outside.

“Mrs. Laura, I must return to the guild. Could I ask you to do something for me?”

Paul asked Laura to ask the girl about her circumstances after letting her calm down, while he ran to the guild.

“I see. It would be indeed better for me to ask her about what happened.”

“I’m sorry. It’s a bit strange since you are the one who hired us, but...”

“It’s fine. I can ask her about it.”

“Ah, I’ll leave it to you then. Wynn, ah, then...”

“Since you’re going back to town, would you like to borrow a horse? Can you ride a horse?”

“That would be helpful.”

Paul immediately left for Simurgh as soon as Laura prepared a horse for him. After seeing him off, Laura reentered the house.

“Now then, how about I warm some water for you to clean up with? A girl like you shouldn’t be this dirty.”

Laura kindly smiled at the Avian girl, who looked up at her with wings folded up.

---

“Scuse me! Can anybody help me with a subjugation mission!?”

Even late in the night, the Eastern Branch of Simurgh’s adventurer’s guild was filled with adventurers loitering around. Many monsters were nocturnal, so the adventurer’s guild was open at all times. All eyes gathered on Paul, who had barged in with a loud voice.

“Did something happen?”

One of the guild receptionists asked him. Lilia must have been on a break.

“Goblins. I believe there is a goblin village nearby. I killed one that I found, but we must quickly form a group to subjugate the rest.”

“If it’s just goblins, can’t your party take care of it? Or are you alone?”

“We’re a party of three, but the other two are just novice kids!”

Paul shouted back. Goblins could the smell blood of one of their own even from miles away. That was why, after slaying the goblin at the Avian village, Paul asked Leti to fly the four of them away. The Avian village was probably swarming with goblins drawn in by the slain goblin’s blood. In addition to that, goblins tended to be hostile towards those who had slain one of their kind. They would be able to tell by scent that it was a human who had killed a goblin and would proceed to attack nearby villages and travellers. The goblins needed to be exterminated before that happened.

“It can’t be helped. If ya lead us to the place, depending on the reward, we’ll help ya out.”

“Really? I’ll lead you. Also, the request was mediated by the guild, so the reward should be recorded.”

Paul told the receptionist that Lilia had processed the request. The receptionist nodded and took a binder out from behind the counter showing it to the forty-something-old adventurer who had offered his help. He then asked Paul for the details of how they had encountered the goblin while he browsed the binder.

“...Alright. There doesn’t seem to be a problem with the reward. Our party will take the job.”

“Thank you very much. I’m Paul.”

“I’m Oort. Nice to meet you. I’ll introduce the rest of my party over there.” (TL note: The Oort Cloud has the same katakana as his name, and that’s good enough for me.)

The man led Paul to a table where his party members were. Their calm demeanor showed that Oort’s party was made up of seasoned adventurers. Paul sighed in relief, having easily obtained competent help.

“That young man is Louis. As you can see from the spear leaning against the table, he uses a spear.”

“Nice ta meetcha.”

Louis was a young man in his twenties, with dark grey hair tied into a ponytail. He greeted Paul by raising his mug of beer. His breastplate had numerous dents and scratches. Paul could also see that his arms were thick and muscular.

“And, this is Eliza. And surprise, surprise – she’s a magician!”

“I’m Eliza. Nice to meet you.”

“Oh!”

Eliza was also in her twenties. She wore a loose robe and had long, dark brown hair. He didn’t see her carrying a weapon, so she probably only used spells to fight.

“It’s reassuring to have a magician with us!”

Paul vigorously shook Eliza’s outstretched hand. Few magic users introduced themselves as magicians. An adventurer party with a magician was sure to be in high demand. It would instantly be considered first-rate.

“And lastly, there’s me. I use an axe and shield.”

Oort pointed to a bulky one-handed axe and an iron shield that was next to Louis’ spear. He had reddish-brown hair and sported a beard. Paul tried to imagine Oort wielding his weapons

‘His enemies would probably scatter at the sight of him, right?’ Paul wondered.

An axe-user, a spear-user, and a magician – it was a well-rounded party.

“I’m Paul. I fight with a sword. I’m very grateful a party like yours is here to help me defeat the goblins. It feels like a waste of your abilities.”

“No problem! And how about your party members?”

“They are standing by at the requester’s house. They’re just two kids.”

Paul felt slightly embarrassed. Compared to Oort’s party, his party was just a bunch of kids playing around. It would be ridiculous to put them on the same level.

“Hahaha, we don’t mind. You rookies did well with the preliminary investigation. Now it’s our turn to follow up.”

“Nobody starts off as a veteran. Be proud of yourself.”

“Ah, thank you.”

“Now that we’ve introduced ourselves, I’d like to go over the details of the request.”

Oort put the request sheet that the receptionist had given him on the table. Louis and Eliza leaned over to look at the paper.

“Paul encountered a goblin, and we are to subjugate the rest of them before they attack nearby villages.”

“I wonder if there is a Goblin King?”

“There has to be. Well, it’s no match for us. Paul’s party will lead us to the actual location. Since they are still rookies, we’ll handle most of the subjugation. The reward for the subjugation goes to us, and the reward for the investigation goes to Paul’s party. Is that fine?”

“No problem.”

“Then, let’s get ready to go!”

---

“Sorry, I made you wait! Huh?”

Having brought the adventurers back with him, Paul barged into Laura's house. He saw three children eating leftover stew by the fireplace. He recognized Wynn and Leti, but there was one more.

"Is she... the Avian?"

While he had been gone, not only had she taken a bath, but also tidied up her hair. Her white wings gave off a silvery glow in the firelight. She was a member of the Avian race, which rivalled the High Elves, and were said to be close to gods and spirits. She was beautiful, almost doll-like. The clothes she wore were probably lent to her by Laura since the sleeves were rolled up to fit her. Holes were made on the back of her clothes for her wings.

"This is my first time seeing an Avian."

Eliza let out a breathless exclamation.

"It seems like she's been through a lot."

Laura told Paul. The sight of her hungrily devouring the stew made her seem like a normal child, rather than some legendary being.

"She's still so young..."

"Did you find out what happened?"

"Yes."

The girl's name was Evelina. One day, dog-headed people and goblins attacked the village where she lived. It happened in the middle of the night. Her parents told her to hide inside the house, so she took cover under her bed. She heard screams and yells from outside. Later, the house caught fire. She eventually passed out from fear. When she came to, it was silent. Luckily for her, the house didn't burn down completely. But she was the only survivor.

Paul and Oort eyed the girl, who was silently eating stew. Eliza was crying.

"Let's take revenge for her."

All the older adventurers nodded.

---

"Dog-headed people, huh..."

"Rather than people, it's better to call them fiends. Though, I guess there isn't

much of a difference to Evelina.”

Eliza corrected Oort. The two adventurer parties sat in a circle, and Evelina was seated on Laura’s lap. Laura hugged her tight.

“When I think of dog-headed creatures, I think of kobolds, or maybe something like therianthropes?”

Beastmen dominated the southern reaches of the Alfana continent. They were rarely seen in the Lemmroussell Empire, which was in the northern part of the continent. The ones that were seen in the north were usually mercenaries or adventurers, befitting their characteristically bulky bodies.

“I don’t think beastmen and monsters would ever join forces, so it’s most likely kobolds.”

Kobolds, like goblins, reproduced quickly. They also had the ability to wield simple weapons, but their strength was not much different from goblins.

“So, where is the exact spot?”

“Now that I think of it, I wonder how far it would be by foot...”

“Huh? Shouldn’t you know? You’ve been there once. Or did you chance upon the place while searching?”

“No, um actually... We flew to the Avian village.”

““What!?””

Oort’s party looked at him as if he was crazy.

‘Yeah, that’s what you should think.’

He was relieved that his reaction wasn’t abnormal.

---

“Oho! This is awesome!”

“This is fun!”

“No way... nowaynowaynoway! This can’t be!”

Oort and Louis were having fun looking around them, but Eliza, the magician, was in denial. The six adventurers were flying to the Avian village in the same luminescent bubble.

“She did it without a spell, and for this many people... I-I can’t believe this.”

“What’s wrong, Eliza? This girl is awesome! She’s probably even better than you, right?”

“It’s on a completely different level!”

Oort called out to Eliza with a carefree voice.

“Do you understand how much this defies the common sense of magic!? It’s unbelievably difficult to be able to fly in the air. And she did just that, without a chant! ‘It just felt like I could,’ she says. Even a royal magician would be stunned!”

“Umm, Eliza, is this really that amazing?”

Eliza was agitated by the unbelievable situation. Paul timidly asked her a question.

“Visualisation is crucial to casting magic. Think of it as drawing a mental picture of what you want to happen. It can’t be a vague idea, it has to be a clear picture. A chant allows you to make that image clearer in order to manifest the change, but this girl just let out her magic power without a chant and forced it to her will.”

Eliza eyed Leti, the one who had cast the flight spell.

“Put simply, this defies all the laws of magic! To other magicians, this is completely impossible!”

Leti was an innate genius in manipulating magic power. It seemed like somebody had taught her the fundamentals of magic. But it seemed like she didn’t know any more than the basics. From what Eliza felt, if Leti only needed a cup’s worth of magic power to allow them to fly, Leti was pouring a whole bucket’s worth of water into the cup. And yet it seemed like they could continue to fly without end. The girl had an inexhaustible amount of magic power, that was sure. If she gained more knowledge about magic...

“So, in short, this young lady here is an amazing person. Got it.”

“Who in the world is she?”

The four older adventurers focused their gazes on Leti. Oblivious to their

awestruck gazes, Wynn and Leti happily laughed as they flew through the sky.

## Chapter 52: Goblin Den

The party kept watch by the fountain in the avian village for the entire night.

“I hope they arrive soon,” said Oort with a sigh, “so that we can enjoy another night of Laura’s hospitality.”

Having decided to start exploring the area once the sun rose the next day, they rested throughout the night with two people on guard. Once the goblins found out that they had returned to the avian village, they could attack at any moment. Despite that threat, they were happy to find that they hadn’t been attacked at all. When the sun rose, they quickly ate breakfast, and then immediately started to explore the village’s surroundings. They easily found several narrow pathways that appeared to have been used by the goblins. Formed into a single file, they started to explore them carefully. Oort and Paul were in the front, Louis and Eliza in the back, and Wynn and Leti in the middle. It didn’t seem like avians ever made their own paths All they found were traces of animals or goblins. Nothing they discovered appeared to be man-made. By the time they found what they had been looking for since dawn, the sun was already high in the sky.

“Oh, there they are.”

Oort, who was leading the line, suddenly stopped walking. He had spotted the goblin den in the caves on the cliffside.

“Goblins? Where?”

While Eliza shushed Wynn, who had tried to get to the front to see, Paul drew his sword, and Louis tightened his grip on his spear.

“They haven’t noticed us yet. But I can’t see their leader anywhere.”

They could only see three goblins standing guard in front of the cave. One of them held an axe-like weapon while the other two wielded clubs.

“Eliza, attack the axe goblin first with magic. Louis and I will take the other two. Paul will watch out for any goblins coming out of the cave.”

“Got it.”

“Wynn, Leti,” continued Oort having turned to the two children. “For now, you two will hide here and watch us fight. You should study the way we work together.”

The two of them nodded.

“Good. Let’s go!”

As soon as Oort, Louis, and Paul charged out from the bushes, Eliza started to chant a spell concentrating deeply.

*“O Fire, bend to my will and create a fireball!”* (TL note: I changed the template for chants. Used to be something like “I, who understands the way of fire...”)

A small flame the size of a candle fire appeared in the middle of Eliza’s palm. It soon grew to the size of a pumpkin, formed into a sphere, and then slowly rose from her hand until it stopped above her head.

“*Strike true, Fireball!*”

Eliza pointed her hand at the axe-wielding goblin, and the fireball flew at it with amazing speed. Feeling the approaching heat, the goblin turned towards the incoming spell. It hit him squarely on the chest and exploded.

“GYAAAAA!”

The goblin let out a hair-raising shriek and was sent flying by the blast. It then rolled on the ground to put out the flames burning its body. The other two flinched from the heat and the explosion. Oort and Louis took that opportunity to close the distance. Oort’s axe cleaved into one goblin’s head while Louis’ spear stabbed the other through the chest.

“Whoa...”

Paul was amazed by the way the party of experienced adventurers fought. He had no chance to do anything after Oort and Louis dashed out of the thickets.

“Don’t let your guard down! More are coming!”

Oort’s shout brought Paul to his senses. Ten more goblins came running out of the cave. Only two of them held metal weapons the rest wielded the familiar thick wooden clubs. Despite their numbers, they weren’t a match for the battle-ready adventurers. Soon, Oort took care of four of them, Louis killed three, and

Paul defeated two. Not wanting to get her comrades caught in friendly fire, Eliza watched them fight with the two kids. But when one of the goblins tried to flee, she slew it with a fireball.

“Hey, was there a Lord there?”

“No, didn’t see one.”

“How strange. There shouldn’t be only this much...”

Oort let the blade of his axe fall to the ground, and rubbed his chin in thought. There was less opposition than he had expected. Unlike Paul, who was winded from defeating two goblins, Oort and Louis quickly regained their breath. To them, the number of goblins that had appeared was nothing special. But Oort could feel the presence of stronger monsters. There was no way the avian village could have been ruined by just twelve goblins.

“Sheesh, are they hiding in the cave? How ‘bout we bury them in the cave with Eliza’s magic?” asked Louis.

“It’s no use if there are other exits,” responded Oort.

“Do we enter the cave then? It stinks in there. I don’t wanna go inside.”

“Don’t complain. It’s our job.”

“They are so relaxed,” sighed Eliza, witnessing Oort and Louis’s banter.

They probably didn’t want to look bad in front of the fledgling adventurers. Eliza looked towards Wynn and Leti, who should have been watching the battle. She noticed something strange.

“What’s wrong, Leti?”

Leti had stiffened, clinging to Wynn’s left arm.

*Could watching her first battle have been too much for her? wondered Eliza, It did seem to be a bit soon for her to become an adventurer.*

“It’s fine, Paul and my party members are strong. They’ll take care the goblins in the blink of an eye.”

Eliza crouched down to meet the frightened Leti’s eyes and spoke in a kind voice

“Onii-chan...”

Leti’s voice was shaky. Eliza looked at Wynn. He was looking at Leti’s face with a worry in his eyes.

“What’s wrong?”

Eliza frowned, perplexed by Leti’s strange behavior. Leti suddenly turned her gaze from Wynn towards the cave. At that moment, Eliza finally realized that a faint trace of magic power could be felt around them. And just as she started looking for the source—

“Oort, above us!”

“Shit—!”

Hearing Eliza’s warning, Oort immediately raised his metal shield. Just in the nick of time, he was able to move it into position to block the bludgeon wielded by a shadow falling down from above. He stumbled back a few steps. The enemy, with its dog head, looked exactly like a kobold. However, it wasn’t the size of a normal kobold, which tended to be no bigger than a human. The kobold in front of them was about three meters tall. It wielded a club bigger than a grown man, one probably better described as a log. The bulging muscles that allowed it to wield such a weapon were clearly visible under its dark brown fur. Nothing about this kobold was normal.

“Hey, hey, is a kobold supposed to be this big?”

Oort’s left arm was numb from the force of the blow, amplified by the force from the kobold jumping off the cliff. He glared at the giant monster.

“It’s as big as an ogre, innit? I’ve never heard of anything like this, but would this be a Kobold Lord?”

“Paul, circle around to its back. We’ll surround it.”

Oort stood in front of the giant kobold, Louis to its right, and Paul circled around behind it.

“Well, let’s go...”

He licked his dry lips, and held his shield up in front of him. He gripped his axe in his right hand. The kobold, didn’t wait, it leapt at him with a growl. Oort

moved his gaze from Louis and Paul, making sure he knew where they were. All three had cold sweat dripping down their cheeks. The kobold's weapon was, to put it simply, a club. It could only be swung around. But that swing alone could crush them. It was a simple weapon, but also a terrifyingly intimidating one.

Wynn, Leti, and Eliza were about ten meters away from Oort, watching the fight. The boy gripped his wooden sword tightly, staring intently at the scene before him.

“Will they be alright?”

“It'll be fine, the three of them are strong,” Eliza replied, closing her eyes in preparation for a spell.

She inhaled, then exhaled. Relaxing her whole body, she mustered her concentration. She blocked out all of the noise from around her, as if she were in the middle of a deep, deep abyss. That's why she never noticed. From the moment they fought the goblins, to the moment the giant kobold appeared, Leti, the girl clinging to the boy named Wynn, had her eyes trained on Eliza. She observed Eliza's every single action, not letting a single movement go unnoticed.

“Haaaaaaaaaa!!”

Oort let out a war cry as he took a step forward in order to focus the kobold's attention on himself. He braced his legs as he stepped. A fierce glint shone in the kobold's eyes as its gigantic club swept across the ground. He heard a thunderous roar from the kobold, and the impact soon followed.

“Gu-guh”

Despite bracing himself and using a shield, Oort's whole body felt the blow.

“Oh shi—”

“—Louis!”

Oort heard Louis swear while he was recovering from the impact. From behind his shield, he saw that Louis had stepped into the path of the kobold's swing, only to be sent flying as the club drove into his side. The enemy's attack was sharper, faster, and fiercer than Louis had expected. It felt more like an

impact of a howling gale than a normal blow. Sensing that the club would reach him before his spear reached the kobold's heart, Louis immediately drew the weapon back to block, but the club easily broke through the shaft and smashed into his ribs. He was sent flying as if his attempt at defense was a bad joke and hit the ground ten meters away.

"Gah... cough..."

He rolled on the ground several times. Thanks to the blow being softened by both Oort's shield and Louis' spear, Louis seemed to still be conscious. Through his groans, his eyes still followed the kobold. If he had taken the full brunt of the blow, he would definitely have been crushed to death. But judging by how things looked, his ribs were definitely broken.

"Friggin Monster!"

With another shout, Oort moved towards the kobold's left side. The kobold, which was recovering from its swing, turned towards Oort.

*"Strike true, Fireball!"*

At that moment, a fireball launched into the monster's chest exploded. The kobold stumbled from the impact. But despite its agonized cries, it didn't fall. Oort could feel the heat and, keeping his shield up, barked out a command.

"Paul, now!"

"Haaaaaaaa!"

Paul stabbed his sword into the Kobold's bulky chest.

"We-we did it..."

Paul let go of the sword as the kobold fell forward with a thud.

"Alright, finally. Good job, Paul."

"Y-yes?"

It was Paul's first time killing such a big monster. He looked down at his hands. They were still shaking. He had acted brave in front of the children, but he was still only eighteen. He had just become a full-fledged adventurer.

"Louis!"

Eliza rushed over to where Louis had fallen.

“Owowowow... I messed up pretty bad.”

“Please! Just shut up for a bit...”

She knelt beside him and placed both hands on his side.

*“O Power, bend to my will, grant this one healing!”*

“Thanks.”

Faint light surrounded Eliza’s hands. She was casting healing magic.

“Remember, since you’ve broken some ribs, I can’t heal you completely, okay?.”

“...As long as I can walk.”

*He’s sturdier than I thought,* thought Oort and sighed with relief as he watched Eliza heal Louis.

He thought about the close call they had, while looking at his shield. It was badly dented as a result of the blow it had taken. Louis was lucky not to suffer worse injuries. They might have been careless in assuming it was just a kobold. He looked back at the fallen monster. It had taken a lot of effort for Paul to make the hole in its back. The young man had put a lot of force into the thrust, and the blade must have gotten stuck in the bone. Then he looked to see if the children were alright.

“Hm?”

Leti was still clinging to Wynn, but she was looking towards him, trembling.

*Was it too much for her? She’s trembling so hard...* he thought as he began to walk towards the children with a smile on his face.

“Heey! It’s alright now. What’s wrong? Were you scared by the fight? Louis and Paul took care of it, so it’s fine. How was it? Did you learn a lot?”

“Mr. Oort...”

“What is it, Wynn?”

“Leti says... Leti says that it’s not dead yet!”

“Whoa...Huh!?”

Just as he heard Wynn’s words, he heard Paul scream.

“...What!?”

Oort whirled around, and saw the kobold, still with the sword in its back, standing back up.

## Chapter 53: Demon (Part 1)

The night Lina's village was ruined, the avian children were told to hide in their houses while their parents fought off the fiends from the forest.

"No matter what happens, don't come out of the house, okay Lina?"

"It'll be alright. Your daddy is strong. I won't lose to mere goblins or ogres."

Upon hearing that goblins had come out from the forest, Evelina's parents told her to hide in their house before they left.

Lightning struck from the sky, pulverizing the rampaging monsters. Their roars echoed outside. Bright flashes of light could be seen. Death cries could be heard from the fiends.

Evelina, too young to endure her terror, ended up fainting. When she woke, everything was deathly quiet.

"Cough...cough..."

The smoke that filled the air made Evelina cough. The roof had collapsed, covering half of the room below in debris. Using the faint moonlight, she eventually found a gap she could fit through and crawled out.

What she saw outside — was not the home she once knew.

Just yesterday, the villagers had been smiling happily. Now, the village was merely a blood-soaked shell of its former self.

She staggered through the empty ruins.

Then, she came upon it.

She saw a large silhouette, outlined by the blazing flames in the background and the pale moonlight from above.

The figure was kicking a round object, playing with it.

Evelina slowly crept closer.

The object rolled over to her, allowing Evelina to see the other side.

"...Daddy?"

It was a head. It belonged to Evelina's father, the strongest person in the

village.

It had the same face that had always smiled at her. She touched it. There was nothing below its neck.

“D-daddy!”

“Heyy! There was another one!!”

The figure stretched its hand out towards Evelina.

There was a feral glint in its eyes. It had the head of a dog or a wolf, and she could see sharp canines lining its mouth.

“This one was yer dad? He was strong. That’s an Avian fer ya. He made me go this far to beat him. He was completely different from those weak human knights. I was right to come here in person.”

The dog-headed demon growled as he crept towards Evelina.

The demon stood up, as tall as a house, and looked down at Evelina.

“Come to think of it, can’t ya Avians talk to each other mentally? Like you’d expect from half-divine spirit-like guys.”

The demon grabbed the girl, who had frozen in fear, by her collar and brought her face close to his.

“I’m gonna let ya be bait. How lucky, ya get to live. I’ll let ya live, at least until no more Avians come after ya.”

Evelina could smell blood wafting from the dog demon’s mouth as he taunted her.

The demon bared a ferocious smile at the wide-eyed Evelina.

The Avians from other villages noticed the disturbances in the village and came to investigate.

Evelina’s emotions of sadness and despair summoned Avians from far away who tried to save her.

However, every time they came, the Avians would be ambushed by the dog demon and were slaughtered.

They were like moths drawn to the flame that was Evelina.

Eventually, the Avians stopped coming.

Evelina didn't know when she would be killed.

She lived in constant terror.

*"Please, someone save me!"*

*"Death is scary! I want to live!"*

Her thoughts cried out to the Avians in other villages.

She sensed their grim reply.

*"Give up."*

When she received that message, Evelina was given no other choice but to carry on alone.

She would never again be able to feel another's embrace.

She would never again hear another's words.

She would never again have another smile at her.

She would only continue to remain alone in the solitude of the ruined village.

*"I'm gonna let ya be bait. How lucky, ya get to live. I'll let ya live, at least until no more Avians come after ya."*

The demon's words rang in her head...

The Avians would no longer come.

Evelina no longer had any worth as bait.

*I'll be killed. No. I don't want to die. It's scary! I don't want to die! I want to live!*

Just as that thought crossed her mind, she heard a boy shout.

*"Foound them!"*

Upon hearing his voice, Evelina slowly roused from her stupor.

---

*"...sob...sob...:"*

Laura put down her needle and thread and peeked into the bedroom.

Her young guest, an Avian girl named Evelina, was crying in her sleep.

The sun was already high in the sky, but Laura quietly walked over, trying not to wake Evelina, and wiped the tears from her cheeks.

Last night, after Evelina had eaten her fill of stew, she had fallen asleep as soon

as she laid down.

She had taken a bath and eaten a warm meal for the first time in months. Now that she was safe, all of the fatigue she had accumulated during her ordeal had probably finally overcome her.

The effects of having not eaten a decent meal since the destruction of Evelina's village could be clearly seen on her emaciated body.

*She's been through so much for someone so young,* Laura thought, looking at the girl.

She saw two small, clenched fists peeking out from Evelina's sleeves. Her sleeves, much too long for Evelina, had been rolled up several times. Laura gently wrapped her hands around Evelina's.

Evelina slowly began to stir.

Her eyes, red from crying, wandered around the room and stopped on Laura's face.

"Did you have a bad dream? It's alright now. You're safe here, there's nothing to be afraid of."

"...Um...Lina... Lina is bait. If Lina is here... something bad... will come and kill everyone..."

Evelina sobbed while trying to speak.

"That's okay, the adventurers will beat up the bad guy."

Laura said to reassure her.

*Be careful everyone,* Laura thought, wishing for the adventurers' safety.

Evelina's words worried her, but she could only continue to comfort the young girl.

---

"Whoa! How cool!"

Oort had blocked the kobold's gigantic club.

Louis had taken a hit, but he had the quick judgement to block it with his spear. Finally, they saw Eliza's fireball spell and Paul's desperate stab. For a moment, the experienced adventurers' coordinated attacks left Wynn enthralled, and he forgot to even blink.

The moment the kobold collapsed, Wynn realized that he had been holding his breath, so he took in a few deep breaths.

He felt excitement bubbling within him.

Shivers ran down his spine.

Sweat flowed down the palm of his right hand and onto his sword.

“They’re so cool, Leti! Amazing! I want to be like them too!”

As they lowered their weapons, the adventurers gave off an air of experience. Wynn chattered excitedly to Leti.

However, Leti was far from excited. She stayed silent, clinging tightly to his left arm.

Surprised, Wynn asked her what was wrong.

“What’s wrong, Leti?”

Leti trembled fearfully and stammered,

“Scary...I’m scared, Big Brother. That dog...isn’t dead yet.”

The kobold was flat on its face with a sword through its heart. Paul was trying to pull out his sword from the monster.

“Huh? Of course it’s dead! It’s fine! They completely beat it!”

Leti shook her head.

“You know what? I can see something weird... Scary things are gathering around the dog.”

Leti clung to Wynn’s arm tighter.

“I’m scared, Big Brother!”

“Scary things? I can’t see them. Are you sure?”

“Leti doesn’t know either. They look like the things that gathered when Miss Eliza made the fireball, but they feel wrong.”

She said tearfully as she pointed to Eliza.

“Heey! It’s alright now. What’s wrong? Were you scared by the fight? Louis and Paul took care of it, so it’s fine. How was it? Did you learn a lot?”

When he noticed Leti's appearance, Oort began walking towards Wynn and Leti.

He tried to make his gruff face seem less threatening.

*Leti has talent I don't have, Wynn thought.*

He had felt this time and time again, be it when training or when studying.

In both swordmanship and magic, Leti had quickly absorbed the skills Wynn taught her.

He was often reminded of the various distinguished people in the stories they read. The knights, heroes, saints, and finally, the Braves.

All of them possessed strength and abilities far beyond the average person.

He believed that Leti's talent most likely rivalled that of those individuals.

She could be the heroine from any of those stories.

Even if Wynn couldn't sense the things she saw, he decided to believe in Leti.

"Mr. Oort."

*If Leti says it isn't dead, then it definitely isn't dead! Wynn thought.*

"What is it, Wynn?"

"Leti says... Leti says that it's not dead yet!"

"What do you mean?"

"Whoa...Huh!?"

Wynn was about to respond when they heard Paul's cry.

"WHAT!?"

"Paul!"

The kobold slowly stood up.

The sword was still embedded within its chest.

Paul fell onto his backside, while staring at the monster in astonishment.

"No way! We pierced its heart! A monster's organs should still be in the same places as those of a normal animal!"

Eliza had healed Louis as much as she could and was in the middle of bandaging his other wounds. The two of them could only stare at the kobold in

shock.

“Heheheh, HAHAHAHA!”

The monster released a loud, unrestrained laugh.

“Well well well, ya guys did pretty good! Are ya the so-called adventurers? Didn’t think I’d be this lucky! Didn’t think I’d enjoy it this much!”

“Th-the kobold talked?”

“It talked? That so weird? I ain’t a simple kobold. Name’s Veldaroth.”

The demon answered Eliza’s bewildered question.

As he laughed, the sword came out of his chest. There was no sound, and no blood spurted from the wound. The sword seemed to slip out on its own. After floating in the air for a moment, it clattered to the ground.

“I was waiting fer that Avian brat to call more of her kind to the village, but it’s been friggin’ boring recently. Won’cha play with me?”

He provoked the adventurers with his words and a beckoning gesture.

“You monster!”

With a shout, Oort charged at the demon Veldaroth. As he ran, he began to swing his axe furiously.

Oort had the strength to even chop through stone.

However, Veldaroth easily stopped Oort’s blow with his free hand.

The axe blade didn’t even scratch the demon’s palm.

“Good hit, but I won’t be cut by a regular blade, ya know? I’m a demon, after all. Y’all need magic or magic weapons. Didn’t ya know that?”

Veldaroth crushed the axehead with his bare hands and swung the handle around.

Oort’s feet left the ground and he flew through the air, like a weed being uprooted, until he crashed into a tree.

“Urgh, monster.”

Oort groaned after he landed.

“Oort!”

Eliza stopped healing Louis, stood up, and quickly began to chant. Oort got back up and charged at the demon again.

“Hey, didn’t I tell ya it won’t work? What’re ya tryin’ to do?”

Oort threw his axe handle at Veldaroth with all of his might. Veldaroth instantly swatted it away.

*“O blade, follow my will: Imbue the blade with my power!”*

Eliza finished her spell.

Her target was Paul’s blade, which had fallen out from Veldaroth’s chest. Oort picked it up and slashed at the demon.

“Enchantment Magic. How interesting!

Oort swung his sword freely.

The blade, imbued with the enchantment, left a trail of light as it flashed through the air.

Oort may have been an axe specialist, but his swordsmanship was still first-rate. Even so, his attack missed his target.

Veldaroth had dodged his swing with an agility unimaginable from his large body.

Then—

“Take that!”

Veldaroth suddenly countered with a swing of his club. It was impossible for Oort to dodge it at such a close range. Instead, he quickly raised his shield to block the attack. The club slammed into the shield with a loud crash. Oort found himself flying through the air again, due to the force of the blow. The sword left Oort’s hands and the blade sunk into the ground near Wynn and Leti.

“Oops. Used too much strength. Sorry for breakin’ yer arm,” the demon taunted.

Oort’s iron shield was completely deformed by the blow.

His shield arm had been completely smashed. Blood gushed out of the wound, and his bones were protruding through his skin.

“Oort!”

Paul rushed over to Oort.

He slung Oort’s uninjured right arm over his shoulder and helped him stand.

“Hey, are ya gonna run away? Did ya think I’d just let ya?”

Veldaroth jeered as he watched them try to move away.

“We aren’t running away from you. I was just getting him out of the way.”

“What?”

“*O fireball, strike true!*”

Eliza used all of her remaining mana to shoot a fireball at Veldaroth, which exploded upon impact.

“We did it!”

Seeing the fireball hit its mark, Eliza cheered, with a tinge of happiness in her voice.

Unfortunately, she was mistaken.

“Weak!”

Veldaroth swung his club.

The gust of wind from his swing blew out the flames like a candle.

“Us demon ain’t affected by anythin’ but spells and magically imbued weapons. Yer spells could hardly be called magic if ya compare them to the Avians’ spells!”

“No way...”

“Well, it did sting a bit. I had some fun, but humans are never strong. The Avians ain’t comin’ neither. I should just take care of ya guys and kill off that bait.”

“You monster...”

Oort bit his lips so hard that they bled. All color drained from Paul’s face.

Eliza, having exhausted all of her mana, lay gasping on the ground. Next to her, Louis had drawn a dagger in place of his broken spear and was struggling to sit up.

Paul's legs were frozen in fear, unable to move another step. Veldaroth moved to stand right before him. The demon's feral glare caused Paul to drop Oort, and he collapsed to the ground himself. His whole body shook and his teeth chattered audibly. Oort, also unable to move, could do nothing but await his imminent death.

"Well, it's the end fer ya. Least ya helped me kill some time, eh?"

Veldaroth raised his club.  
Then suddenly—

"GYAAAAAAAH!!"

The tip of Paul's sword suddenly appeared again in Veldaroth's chest, just like it had moments before.

Veldaroth screamed in pain.  
The blade emitted a faint glow.  
Veldaroth couldn't ignore the damage this time around.

"Who...who did that?"

As if responding to Oort's question, the person who stabbed Veldaroth kicked the demon as they pulled the sword from the demon's back.

"Wynn!"

Oort saw Wynn standing there, wielding Paul's sword.

"Argh. Yer pretty good fer a brat. Ya wanna play, too?"

"No! Run, Wynn! Don't be stupid!"

Louis yelled.  
Ignoring him, Wynn ran straight at Veldaroth.  
He was faster than anyone thought a child his age could be.  
"Stop scurryin' around!"

Veldaroth swung his club.  
Right before it reached him, Wynn leapt back.  
The blast of air from the swing pushed Wynn even further backwards.  
Wynn adjusted his stance midair and landed lightly on the ground.  
Then Veldaroth bared his fangs.  
Light coalesced in his mouth as he gathered magic power.  
After a moment, he shot beams of light from his mouth at Wynn, one after another.  
Wynn wove side to side, dodging the beams, as he made his way towards Veldaroth.  
Once Wynn got close enough, Veldaroth closed his mouth and swung his club again.  
Wynn slid under the swinging club.  
It wouldn't have been possible if he had a bigger body.  
Wynn could hear the wind as the club passed over him.  
The gale caused by the swing felt like it was ripping his hair out.  
Still, Wynn pushed on and slashed at Veldaroth's thigh.  
"Ya messed up! There ain't much mana left in the sword. Can't even scratch me!"  
It was true, the sword would barely cause any damage to the demon.  
Veldaroth let go of his club and attempted to smack Wynn with his hand.  
Wynn used Veldaroth's descending arm as a foothold and thrust at the demon's canine face.  
The demon dodged by tilting his head and shook his arm to dislodge Wynn from it. He sent a roundhouse kick at the airborne Wynn.  
Realizing that he was midair with Veldaroth's leg swiftly approaching, Wynn stretched out his left arm and used his elbow to cushion the blow. He was launched through the air by the force of the kick.  
"Leti!" Wynn called out.  
"What!?"  
Veldaroth, following Wynn's line of sight, turned around.  
He saw a fireball — several times larger than the one Eliza had created earlier — floating above Leti.

“What the hell!?”

When Veldaroth turned around completely, Leti pointed at the demon. The fireball shot towards Veldaroth, leaving scorching hot air in its wake. When it hit, a pillar of fire erupted into the sky.

## Chapter 54: Demon (Part 2)

Clouds of dust and flames whirled as a shockwave rippled through the surroundings.

There was a thunderous boom as the ground shook. Waves of intense heat and air forced everyone to cover their faces.

Wynn laid his body flat on the ground to prevent himself from being blown away by the explosion.

*How strong,* Eliza marveled as she shielded her face with the sleeves of her robe.

The dust flying through the air prevented her eyes from fully opening, and she struggled to find Leti.

Trying to ignore the stinging in her eyes, she finally caught sight of Leti. Leti had crouched to weather the oncoming shockwave.

Whenever a spell was invoked, the caster would be surrounded by residual mana, which functioned as a shield, protecting them.

The stronger the spell, the more mana resided, so Leti's shield should have blocked most of the shockwave.

“Fireball” was one of the most basic offensive spells, but the one Eliza cast couldn't even compare to the one Leti had just cast.

Despite using a spell far surpassing Eliza's abilities, Leti didn't seem tired at all.

*If it's this, even a demon would...*

“Awooooooo!”

Eliza's thoughts were interrupted by a wolf-like howl.

At the same time, a maroon light pierced through the inferno.

The flames dispersed as smoke rose from where the wolf was last seen.

“No... no way...” stammered Eliza with widened eyes.

“Impossible!” Louis cried out in disbelief.

“Whoa, that was surprising. Didn't think a strong magician 'd be here.”

Veldaroth had cut through the flames, but smoke still rose from his body.

His right arm had grown by several sizes, maroon light pulsing along its length.

“There was a lotta mana, but I dunno why she used normal flames. Guess she’s still green, eh?”

Eliza ground her teeth when she heard why the demon was unscathed.

The fireball that Leti had cast was the same spell as Eliza’s.

She imagined the spell in exactly the same way as Eliza did, so Leti didn’t channel her mana efficiently into the spell.

As Veldaroth said earlier, Eliza was far from being a first-rate magician.

She was skilled... for an adventurer. Compared to the empire’s knights and court magicians, she was a mere novice.

This was apparent in the Fireball spell she had cast.

For every ten units of mana she used to make the fireball, only two, at most, would enchant the flames.

Two of the remaining eight units were spent casting the spell, and five were used to create normal, unenchanted flames.

The remaining unit became the shield of residual mana.

A magician’s skill depended largely upon their own comprehension, which was expanded by gaining knowledge from arcane grimoires, and experience gained from trial and error.

Senior magicians tended to outperform their juniors because they could enchant more of the flames through their accumulated knowledge and experience.

Unlike most living things and monsters, which could be injured by the ordinary flames, demons were different. Veldaroth could only be affected by two-tenths of the total magic power used for the spell — the two-tenths enchanting the flames.

“More... If only I’d used more mana...” mourned Eliza, consumed by regret. Since Leti merely mimicked Eliza’s “Fireball”, including its flawed magic composition, the spell was lacking and fell short of its full potential.

“Ya seem more interestin’ than these guys over here.”

Veldaroth turned his bloodthirsty gaze towards Leti.

The adventurers could feel the intense, suffocating pressure.

Leti's face froze in terror as the bloodthirst focused on her. She couldn't make a sound. Her feet trembled, her teeth chattered. Tears streamed from her eyes and down her pretty porcelain cheeks.

"Hey, show me that spell again. Come play with me."

"Eek!" Leti could only let out a frightened squeak.

"Sigh... Just a brat. Too scared to even put up a fight. What's wrong? I wanna see another one a' those. Or was that the best ya can do? If so... I'm gonna kill ya, yanno?" threatened Veldaroth as he bared his teeth at Leti, who was frozen and pale.

Pointing his right hand at the little girl, he said, "If I can't play with ya, then I might as well kill ya. If I let ya live, ye'll grow up to be a real dangerous toy." Maroon light gathered at the tip of Veldaroth's right hand and grew rapidly in size.

"Leti!"

A moment before Veldaroth's magic blasted Leti's head to pieces, Wynn darted next to Leti and grabbed her arm.

He ran while dragging her away.

The maroon light missed its mark and struck the ground, sending debris into the air.

Wynn hugged Leti to shield her from the shards that flew towards them.

"Ugh..." Leti heard Wynn groan in the midst of the violent storm of debris. When the dust finally settled, she opened her eyes and saw the boy hugging her tightly.

"B-big...Brother...?"

"Are you okay, Leti?" asked Wynn as blood flowed from his forehead and arms.

"Big Brother...blood...blood is..."

"It's no big deal. More importantly, were you hurt, Leti?"

Tearfully, Leti shook her head.

She tried to hug him, but Wynn gently pushed her away.

He got up and readied his sword as he moved protectively in front of her.

"How brave of you," sneered the demon.

“Big Brother!” cried Leti.

Leaving her behind, Wynn circled around Veldaroth. He moved in a zigzag pattern and appeared to be trying to stab Veldaroth’s torso. Suddenly, he crouched and aimed his attack at the demon’s feet. However, just before his blade struck, Veldaroth leapt into the air. Wynn sprang after him and twisted his body in preparation to slash at the airborne demon.

“Huh?”

But Veldaroth had escaped his vision.

“Ya move well, but yer too slow!”

“!?”

As Wynn landed, he tried to quickly turn around.

He saw Veldaroth charging at him.

Wynn tried to brace himself in a defensive stance, but Veldaroth drove his right leg into Wynn’s solar plexus before he could do so.

He flew through the air in an arc. He bounced once, twice, thrice.

“Big brother!”

“Wynn!”

Despite Leti and Paul’s cries, Wynn didn’t stir.

The pale light faded from the fallen sword beside him.

“Ooh, he passed out. Welp, I had fun, so I’ll stop fer today.”

Veldaroth glared at the adventurers.

He held up three fingers and said, “Three days. I’ll give ya that much time. Ye should be able to recover yer mana by then. After that, I’ll kill all of ya, startin’ with that girl, then that avian brat. The great Demon Lord commanded me to slaughter avians whenever I find ‘em. And that girl’s mana is too dangerous to let ‘er live.”

Veldaroth smiled savagely. It almost seemed like his mouth was about to split from how widely he bared his fangs.

“And once I kill those two brats, the rest of ya are next. Ya don’t think ye can run away from a demon like me, do ya? If ya wanna live, get yerselves ready fer me. Won’t that be fun?”

Laughing raucously, Veldaroth effortlessly jumped off the ground. He disappeared in moments, taking the intense pressure with him. Not one of the adventurers left behind could move an inch.

---

“We’re doomed. We can’t beat that... that demon,” Oort sighed as he tied a splint to his broken left arm.

“Neither Eliza’s nor Leti’s magic was able to hurt that monster,” Paul whispered as he cried.

“I didn’t think demons were that strong,” murmured Louis as he stared blankly at the fire.

He had been put out of commission by Veldaroth’s first strike, and he felt more vexed by that fact than he was worried about their chances of beating the demon.

His frustration had grown as he watched Wynn engage the demon.

The boy was currently asleep on Eliza’s lap.

Since she had run out of mana, the places where he had been wounded by pebbles could only be treated with ointment, then bandaged.

Judging by the red stains on the bandage wrapped around his forehead, his wounds must have been very painful.

Leti had cried herself to sleep while clinging onto Wynn.

The adventurers couldn’t return to Simurgh, or even Laura’s house, because the two children were marked for death when Veldaroth returned in three days. They had no choice but to wait patiently for Leti to wake up and fly them all back.

The adventurers were also exhausted.

“We can’t beat that demon. We have to ask the Knight Order for help.”

“Will the Knight Order act?” asked Eliza.

Demons didn’t recklessly appear on the front lines on a whim.

The true reasons were unknown, but scholars theorized that it was due to their low numbers. Demons avoided dispersing their forces out of fear of being crushed by deities, spirits, or dragons if they did so.

That was why, despite such an overwhelming difference in individual power, humanity had been able to build and maintain a line of defense.

The Demon Lord's main forces were complete monsters. This was the knowledge humans had acquired over decades of war.

"But we don't have a choice. They might not listen to us, but they'll listen to the Adventurers' Guild."

"Either way, we'll have to wait for Lil' Leti to wake up," said Louis, bringing the discussion to a close, and they fell silent.

The only sound was the crackling of the fire. They watched quietly as the sparks slowly drifted into the sky.

## Chapter 55: Demon (Part 3)

“No. I will not leave this girl alone. I know it’s dangerous, but I won’t run away.”

“But Laura, you could get hurt.”

“It’s a demon, ya know? Its target is this girl and us adventurers. You shouldn’t get yourself caught up in this too!”

Despite Paul and Louis’ pleas, Laura refused to give in. Seeing how tightly she hugged Evelina, Oort guessed that she had grown attached to the avian girl. Oort examined his left arm, which had been healed with magic, while listening to the argument unfolding in front of the house.

“It looks like your injured arm will be fine.”

“Yeah, thanks.”

Oort turned to the smiling, young man in magician’s robes. He was the sole magician among the knights who were sent here. The golden amulet engraved with a pentagram hanging from his neck signified his status as an Imperial Court Magician.

“I’m glad it healed up well.”

Oort turned back towards the three people who were arguing.

“Seems like they couldn’t persuade her.”

“Yeah, looks like it.”

Having given up, Paul and Louis dejectedly walked away, leaving Laura standing there defiantly.

“Well, I guess such a young kid would have gotten in the way during combat, so we needed someone to look after her anyway. But we can’t guarantee her safety.” The magician peered at Laura and quietly clicked his tongue.

“How surprising. I thought that the Imperial Magicians were all just prideful snobs. I didn’t think you’d admit to the possibility of failure.”

"Haha, good one. But just between us..." The magician lowered his voice and said, "The ones who get sent to battle aren't exactly high-status. We're essentially commoners. Well, there are exceptions, but..."

"I see."

The magician led Oort to the grassy plains adjoining Laura's fields. They were planning to fight the demon on the plains to minimize any damage to the surrounding area. As they walked beside each other, Oort felt several gazes upon him. The stares came from the five knights keeping watch on the plains. Upon receiving Oort's news about the demon, the Adventurer's Guild immediately requested for aid from the Knight Order. But their only reinforcements were merely five knights and a young magician.

*Wait a minute! You're up against a demon, right? What were they thinking, sending so few people?!* shouted Lilia the receptionist when she had found out.

Oort hesitantly asked, "...Do you think we have enough people to win?"

"I guess it'd be great if we could win with just us," replied the magician with a troubled expression.

Demons who served under the Demon Lord were split into three classes based upon strength. The Demon Dukes, Marquis, and Counts were the strongest demons. Demon Viscounts and Barons formed the second class while Demon Knights and Demon Soldiers were the third class. Demons who held a rank of Count or higher possessed their own names. The higher their rank, the stronger the demon was. Once, long ago, a Demon Duke appeared and brought a thriving civilization to ruins.

In the present, five hundred years later, the border between the humans and demons had reached the country just northwest of Lemmroussell. Despite this, the only people in the Empire who felt any sense of crisis were the people who lived near the northwestern border and the soldiers on the front lines. To those deep in the heart of the empire, it was just a remote issue on the level of fighting off random monsters. Having never felt the flames of war, the Empire decided it was enough to simply send a few knights to the warfront whenever they were asked to support the continental war effort.

"Well, here's what the higher-ups think. Demons don't just randomly appear,

even on the front lines, so your information must be faulty. They paid more attention to the fact that the demon looked like a giant kobold than the fact that the demon had the name Veldaroth. This case is unprecedented, so it's not too surprising that they didn't believe you," shrugged the magician, clicking his tongue a few more times. Oort guessed that the tongue-clicking was a habit.

"We may not be much, but as much as we don't want to, we'll give it our all."

"We'll be counting on you."

The two men looked on as the sun set over the horizon. The sky was dyed blood-red. The three-day deadline was over, and the third night was coming.

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The sun had set, and dusk had arrived.

"Big Brother..."

The adventurers standing a small distance from the knights were the first to notice the disturbance. Laura hugged Evelina tightly to her chest. They had decided that they should come along, since they would have been in danger anyway, even if they had stayed back at the house. Leti's gaze was fixated on a single corner of the fields. She clung tightly onto Wynn. There was a pitch-black shadow in that corner.

"What the hell? There's only this many of ya?" Veldaroth sneered as his body materialized from the shadow.

"That's no kobold!"

"That's a demon... It's definitely not a kobold!"

"Damn higher-ups! It's all because they didn't read the report!"

Wynn could hear the knights' groans in front of him.

"Y'all underestimated me. Hey. Are ya sure ya understood that this was gonna be a fight for yer lives? I ain't lettin' any of ya go, yanno?" Ignoring the panicked knights in front of him, Veldaroth issued a death sentence to the adventurers behind them. The same suffocating pressure from their last encounter enveloped the adventurers. The knights standing between them were not spared from his intimidating aura. Bone-chilling fear penetrated everyone present, causing them to shudder.

“T-this is...”

*Is this it? Stopped with only his bloodlust?* Oort raised his shield as if trying to ward off the intimidating pressure. He glanced at Leti next to him. The girl was curled up, hiding behind Wynn’s back.

*Did she also feel this same bloodlust last time?* Oort was impressed by the girl’s mental fortitude. A more feeble-minded person would’ve lost consciousness by now. Although the battle-hardened knights and adventurers had shrunk back, they were still conscious. Oort noticed that Laura hadn’t succumbed to the pressure either. She continued to hug Evelina tightly, enduring that fearsome bloodthirst. However, enduring was all they could do. Everyone, including the knights, were frozen in place, barely able to keep themselves from being overwhelmed.

Everyone, save for one.

Oort saw something move from the corner of his eye. Wynn strode forward, unsheathing his sword to point it at Veldaroth.

“...Som-someone like you... There’s no way you’ll win!” he boldly declared, red-faced as he protectively moved Leti behind him. His words freed everyone else from Veldaroth’s spell.

“Tch! The enemy is a demon! We’ve prepared for this! Draw your swords! Move according to plan!” the magician ordered, leading the knights.

“*I seek strength!*” the knights chanted in unison, and their bodies were enveloped in light.

“*Oh frozen ice, take form!*” chanted one of the knights, and ice formed at Veldaroth’s feet. At the same time, a spike sprouted from the ground and stabbed at Veldaroth’s chest. The sharp tip would have penetrated through a normal human with ease.

“Grrrah!!!” Veldaroth swung the same giant club he had last time. The magically formed spear was smashed to bits, sending shards into the air. The three knights who weren’t chanting closed in. Their mana-imbued swords cut silver arcs through the debris.

“There was no impact?!”

“Hey, up here!” Veldaroth had jumped high in the air, and then his club came swinging down onto the three knights. There was a crash as the club smashed into their shields.

“They blocked it!” Oort exclaimed in surprise. The knights were able to endure the blow that had broken his left arm. Veldaroth was knocked back by the recoil from the blow, and tried to regain his footing.

*“Oh Luster of Steel! Rend the void with a thousand blades!”* chanted the magician when he gathered enough mana. Veldaroth crouched into a defensive stance as countless glittering metallic shards appeared and rained down upon him.

“Whoa...” Someone’s amazed voice reached Wynn’s ears as he watched the battle breathlessly. Leti was also timidly watching the battle unfold from behind his back.

*So strong! Amazing! So cool!* The knights Wynn so admired were now fighting right before his eyes! His heart danced. The attack that the adventurers hadn’t been able to endure didn’t overwhelm the knights. Instead, they had even been able to repel such a strong blow.

“I knew it! Knights really are the strongest!” Wynn boasted to Leti, unable to contain his excitement. “So so awesome! I want to be just like them!”

Spears of fire, wind, and earth took shape and flew at the demon one after another. In the darkness, silver flashes of mana could be seen all around Veldaroth. Each time Veldaroth moved to attack, the magician fired a strong offensive spell at him. After each spell, the knights would immediately follow up with an attack. Their coordination was impeccable.

“But Big Brother, a scary feeling is growing from that dog person!” whispered Leti, her voice quivering as she looked at Wynn fearfully.

“Huh?” Wynn barely had time to comprehend Leti’s warning before the situation turned for the worse.

“Whoa!”

Veldaroth’s left arm suddenly shot out from the curtain of smoke created by the fireballs, and gripped the head of one of the knights.

“W-wait!” For fear of hitting their comrade, the barrage of magic subsided for a moment.

*Crunch*

Veldaroth’s other arm sank into the poor knight’s chest. With a surprised cry, all strength left the dying knight’s body, which was then cast aside. Veldaroth glared at the other knights. They leapt back to gain some distance, their reinforced legs allowing them to move more quickly. To any normal human, they would have appeared to vanish, but Veldaroth easily caught up to the knights.

“Yer too damn slow!” Veldaroth shouted as his leg swept through the air. An audible crunch was heard as the demon’s leg met another knight’s head. His body flew through the air, as limp as a ragdoll.

Veldaroth appeared to be completely unscathed despite the barrage of attacks he had just endured. He bared his teeth, then bellowed in laughter, “Hey, I was just getting started!”

“Eliza, imbue our weapons with mana,” ordered Oort quietly with a whisper. He wouldn’t go down without a fight. With a thud, another knight was killed, his body sent flying, limbs splayed out.

Eliza had just begun chanting when she heard a scream.

“EeeaaaaAAAAAAA!”

“Hey, Wynn!”

Wynn charged straight at Veldaroth.

“What?!” The Imperial Magician flinched, then tried to stop Wynn, but couldn’t do so in time.

“Hey! You can’t beat him with a normal sword! *‘Oh blade, follow my will: Imbue the blade with my power!’*” Wynn’s sword shone with light.

“Well, if it isn’t the brat from the other day! So you wanna be the first to die, eh?” Yet another knight’s head was blown away, and Veldaroth turned to face the young boy.

“Tch. It won’t last long, but... *‘Oh magic, heed my orders! Flow into him! Show*

*your strength!"*" With another tongue click, the magician cast another spell. Wynn accelerated instantly. In the blink of an eye, he had reached Veldaroth's chest. Wynn made a diagonal slash. Pulling back the sword, Wynn stabbed at the demon. Veldaroth twisted sideways, dodging the thrust.

"Nice skills! You would've been a great swordsman if ya hadn't met me!" Veldaroth swung his fist down, and Wynn narrowly avoided being crushed. He crouched down, slashed at the demon's feet, then leapt back. Maroon light shot from Veldaroth's mouth at him. Wynn zigzagged as he retreated.

"Damn! There aren't any openings to jump in..."

"Can't you cast strengthening magic on us too?"

"Tch. I could if I had to, but it won't last long enough!"

"But, that boy Wynn is..."

"Yeah, I'm surprised too. It was more effective on him than I thought, but it won't last forever!" Oort's party had run over to the magician, but could only grind their teeth in frustration, unable to intervene. Wynn and Veldaroth were locked in a high-speed confrontation. They would clash, separate, then immediately clash again.

"I can't cast any attack magic like this!" Eliza interrupted her chant, unable to safely provide support fire.

"Stay still, damn it!" growled Veldaroth as he shot one ball of light after another. The pace of his attacks had grown faster and faster. The fact that he was having more trouble than expected irritated him. One of the balls of light hit the ground near Wynn's feet. He used the impact to drive himself upwards. The force of the explosion allowed him to jump higher.

"Tch! It's no good! Even if he lands a blow, the magic I imbued is too weak!" clicked the magician regretfully. Veldaroth raised his left arm, clad in maroon light, and blocked Wynn's attack. Wynn's blade never reached Veldaroth's body. With a single swing of the demon's arm, Wynn was sent flying through the air. He landed on his feet, but Veldaroth was already on top of him. A barrage of punches and kicks rained down upon the boy. Wynn desperately dodged each blow, unable to find a single opening to attack. Each time he tried

to back away, Veldaroth closed the distance.

“It’s over... The strengthening magic is going to...” The white light shrouding Wynn’s body was gradually fading away. Additionally, Veldaroth’s attacks were full of feints, trying to confuse Wynn. Veldaroth kicked at Wynn’s left side. Wynn held his sword vertically, his left arm bracing against the flat of the blade, trying to weather the force of the kick.

“Can’t you cast another strengthening spell?!”

“Tch! Only someone with more magic power than me can overwrite my spell while it’s still in effect!” clicked the magician again as he answered Oort’s desperate question.

“Shit! We can’t do anything!” cursed Louis. Paul clenched his fists to the point of bleeding.

Suddenly, they all heard a song that felt out of place, given the tense situation. “What the heck?!” the adventurers exclaimed as they turned around.

“There is no way Big Brother will lose!” The source of the song was Leti. In the air behind her shone several magic circles. A blinding light blazed from Wynn’s body.

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As she held onto Evelina, Laura noticed something strange about the other girl, Leti. All she was doing was staring at the fight between Wynn and Veldaroth. Before Wynn charged into the battle, she had been timidly watching the knights fight from behind his back. When the knights began to be cruelly slaughtered, Laura had covered Evelina’s eyes as she closed her own. But now, she just continued to stare blankly as the fight continued.

<Did she go mad from fear? Laura wondered. After a while, a faint sound left Leti’s tiny lips. Laura thought the sound came from chirping birds, but by straining her ears, she could hear a clear, angelic song. Laura instinctively reached out to hug Leti too.

*Whoosh* Before her hand reached the girl, a gust of wind blew Laura’s hand away. Buffeted by the wind, Laura squinted, trying not to lose sight of Leti. Countless intricate circular patterns of lights formed around Leti. The magician would have recognized it as a magic circle.

“...no way...” Leti stopped singing to whisper something.

“Huh?” Laura could barely hear her voice above the gale.

“There’s no way Big Brother will lose!” The second time, she heard it clearly. The frightened Leti was gone. Her voice rang across the plains, and it seemed as if it could reach Wynn fighting in the distance. At the same time, Wynn’s body glowed brighter.

“My magic is being overwritten?!” gasped the magician, shocked.

“Was it that brat?!” Veldaroth also noticed it. One by one, magic circles appeared around him. With a casual wave of his hand, balls of lights shot towards Leti. Just as his attention was fully focused on Leti, she cried out, “Beat him up!”

Wynn’s blade shone brighter than ever before. With explosive speed, he closed in and swung his sword, lopping off Veldaroth’s defenseless arm.

“AAAAAAAAAAAARGH!!!” the demon roared. The knights’ swords felt like flimsy toothpicks compared to Wynn’s blade. His severed arm crumbled into dust.

“GrrrrrrRRR!” growled Veldaroth as he glared at Wynn, his eyes burning with fury and hellfire.

“ROAAAAR!!!” Losing himself to anger, Veldaroth let loose a beam of light, but Wynn vanished from his sight with a blur. Even the adventurers watching could barely follow his movements. They were astounded at how quickly Wynn adapted to his greatly enhanced physical abilities. Missing its mark, the beam of light blasted through a nearby hill, and into the forest. A moment later, there was a thunderous boom.

Everyone stared at the giant mushroom cloud, not wanting to imagine what would have happened if that beam had hit the capital instead. Unlike the rapidfire balls of light earlier, that beam could have destroyed the entire city. Veldaroth was beginning to reveal his true strength.

Wary of such destructive power, Wynn moved in closer. He slashed his sword horizontally, then swung it down from above. Veldaroth didn’t try to block the slash directly this time. The light from Leti’s mana had honed the edge of

Wynn's blade and could easily slice through the demon. He encased his remaining right arm in maroon light and punched Wynn's blade of light. When the maroon light collided with the white, the blade was stopped. The auras clashed with each other, negating the impact of the collision. Veldaroth tried to take some distance, moving at a speed surpassing that possible for any human. Or it should have been. However, Wynn kept pace with him.

Flashes of maroon and white light lit up the night sky as they continued to duel. The stalemate continued for what felt like an eternity. Suddenly, Veldaroth crouched down, trying to sweep Wynn off his feet. The boy jumped back to dodge. Seeing that the demon was crouching, Wynn immediately leapt forward to stab at him. In that moment, Veldaroth opened his mouth, maroon light converging in it.

*It was a trap!* thought the adventurers, magician, and the sole surviving knight. Veldaroth's lowered body made his head seem defenseless, but it was merely a lure for Wynn. No matter how strong Wynn's body had become, no one could dodge in mid-air. A feral glint shone in Veldaroth's eyes. Making a split second decision, Wynn reached out even further with his sword. When the blade of white light struck the maroon light, it exploded. Wynn surely couldn't avoid such an explosion from that distance. However, he appeared from the blast unscathed, shielded by soft feathers seemingly made of light.

Leti turned her eyes away from Wynn to look at Evelina. The avian girl was standing, her pure white wings spread wide, red eyes glittering. Her silver hair fluttered in the wind as she had her right hand pointed straight at Wynn. Avians were a race considered to be almost divine, blessed with the protection of the wind spirit. Evelina had cast a spell to give him a similar protection. Leti didn't know exactly what had happened. All she knew was that Evelina did something. For the first time since they had met, Leti flashed a brief smile at the girl who was of the same age as her before turning back to Wynn.

In Leti's eyes, no one was stronger. No one was more noble. No one was more reliable. The girl watched as the boy picked up the sword that had been knocked away by the explosion. Veldaroth's head had been blown up in the explosion, but his body remained standing. Wynn's blade ran across the width of the demon's body.

# Chapter 56: Epilogue to Interlude ~ Arc 3 Prologue

Veldaroth's massive body crumbled into pieces. Eventually, the wind blew all the pieces away, and Wynn relaxed his grip on his sword. He fell to his knees, his lungs gasping for air, as the light enveloping his body faded.

"Big brother!" Leti cried as she ran towards him and jumped onto his back.

"Whoa... Ow! Leti! That hurts!" Wynn complained as their bodies tumbled across the grassy plains.

"Well, I'll be damned," Oort sighed as he watched them. "Those kids completely hogged the spotlight."

"Yeah. Tsk, I'm not looking forward to the report I'll have to write," grumbled the magician.

Wynn had faced Veldaroth alone. The whole battle seemed like an intricate dance. The knights displayed sophisticated coordination in their attacks, and Wynn and Veldaroth had engaged in a deadly duet. Even a veteran adventurer like Oort had found it impossible to step in. If they had clumsily stumbled into the dance, they risked getting in Wynn's way. There was practically no room for intervention. Rather, the only ones who could help were the two girls, Leti and Evelina. Embarrassingly, the adults could do nothing but watch.

Oort scratched his head as he walked over to where Wynn and Leti were rolling around. Noticing his approach, Wynn sat up. Suddenly, Oort's fist came crashing down on Wynn's head.

"Oww!"

"Don't just run off on your own... The only good adventurer is one that is alive. Better to be cowardly than dead."

Wynn clutched his head, and Leti stood up to protect him. Despite her teary eyes, she looked like she was about to tell Oort off. Oort's glare melted into a

smile and he ruffled Wynn's hair.

"You did well, kid."

"Eheheh..." laughed Wynn as his head was patted. Then, he flopped back onto the ground.

The grass under him felt cool. His whole body seemed to burn after that furious fight, so the grass was really comfortable. With those thoughts, he passed out.

"Big Brother?!"

Seeing that Wynn had closed his eyes and stopped moving, Leti hurriedly tried to shake him awake.

"He's fine, he's just tired," reassured Paul as he stopped her shaking.

Leti looked up at him; then, she looked back at Wynn and nodded understandingly.

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When he opened his eyes, Wynn found himself covered with a blanket and lying on soft sheets instead of grass.

"H-huh?"

For a moment, he didn't know where he was. Trying to regain his bearings, Wynn blinked and looked around before finally realizing he was in Laura's house. A fire was crackling in the fireplace, sparks wafting up the chimney. Wynn noticed that Leti was snuggled up beside him, still asleep.

"Oh hey, you're awake?"

"Paul?"

"Does anything hurt? You suddenly collapsed, so Leti was really worried. Well, I think yer fine, but I've heard of cases where minor-looking injuries turned out to be serious. Say something if you feel weird anywhere."

"Okay. My whole body aches, but I think I'm fine. Where are we?"

"We're at Laura's house. I was heading over to where the magician guy is cooking some soup."

"The magician... Oh wait! What about the weird dog monster?!"

"Calm down, you beat it. We're good." Paul handed Wynn a wooden cup. "Drink, it'll warm you up."

The cup was filled with warm milk. Wynn sat up to drink and asked, “What about Leti?”

“She was awake right beside you until a little while ago. Using magic probably tired her out. She worked really hard.”

“I see...” mused Wynn. The milk sent a warm feeling though his body, waking him up. Memories of the fight against Veldaroth came rushing back to him.

He remembered how light his body felt. He could see all of the attacks coming at him, and it had become easy to dodge attacks that he couldn’t even glimpse before. The sword also felt light in his hands, as if it were an extension of his body. With each step, he moved great distances, allowing him to close in on his target in an instant.

*I wonder if it was all thanks to Leti,* he thought as he stroked her hair softly, trying to avoid waking her.

“...mmm...” mumbled Leti as she shifted slightly.

“U-um...” Wynn heard a small voice call out from the doorway. Evelina’s head was peeking out of the entrance, seemingly wanting to say something. After wavering for a few moments, she eventually gathered the courage to face Wynn and Paul. “Thank you very much.”

“No problem.”

“You’re welcome.”

Paul awkwardly held out his hand towards Evelina as Wynn smiled at her. Evelina returned his smile. It was a smile that had not been seen since before her village was attacked half a year ago. Evelina tiptoed over to Wynn. They talked for a bit before going outside to play a game with pebbles. Evelina listened attentively as Wynn taught her the rules.

---

When Leti woke up, she noticed that Wynn wasn’t sleeping beside her anymore. “Where’s Big Brother?” she asked.

“He just went outside,” replied Paul.

She scanned the room for Wynn’s figure, but quickly realized he wasn’t inside. Just as Paul said, she was able to find Wynn playing with Evelina outside.

“No fair, Lina!!” Leti’s cheeks puffed out with childish jealousy.

“Oh, you’re awake! Let’s play together!”

Despite the fact that Leti was miffed, she still joined the other two children in their game.

Laura and the adventurers came back to see them playing.

“Oort, I... I think I’ll adopt the child.”

“She’s from a different race, you know? Don’t you think it’ll be hard?”

“It’ll be fine. Avian or not, a child is a child. Look at them playing together. If they can get along, then there’s no reason I can’t adopt her.”

Leti had forgotten her jealousy and became absorbed in the game. Wynn had won the first round. With teary eyes, Leti started another game with Evelina as Wynn watched from the side.

“I hope Evelina doesn’t ever lose her smile again.”

“Me too.”

The cheerful cries of the children playing were carried across the plains by the wind.

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“...and that’s what happened.”

A sigh echoed across the room after Wynn finished telling his story. In one of Simurgh Knight Academy’s many rooms, five people listened to his story: Prince Alfred of Lemmroussell, Princess Cornelia, the High Elf Tiara, and Royce, Wynn’s direct superior.

Wynn’s body glowed with a pale light. Tiara had asked for the others’ permission to cast enhancement magic on Wynn. The spell she cast was Body Strengthening, the preferred spell of knights.

“How surprising! I have never seen someone with so little mana; he has no resistance to magic at all, thus amplifying the effects of the spell.”

When Tiara asked him if he had any experience with enhancement magic, Wynn told them the story of his first battle as an adventurer.

“I see,” Alfred said, nodding his head in satisfaction. “So his strength would increase tremendously if he is aided by someone who can cast enhancement magic.”

“That was when I was nine, and Leti — I mean — Lady Mavis was seven-years-

old at the time.”

“So, what happened after you slew the dog-headed demon?” Alfred asked, curious about what happened next. A demon — a high-level named one — was slain by such young children. One of them eventually became the Brave, and the other was her master, but it was still an unbelievable story.

Wynn continued his tale.

---

Two days after the battle, Oort’s party and the three novice adventurers returned to the Adventurer’s Guild to split the reward. In the end, most of it went to Wynn. Oort’s party and Paul only took the expenses necessary for the goblin extermination while the rest was passed on to Wynn. The reward Laura had put up was obviously not enough to compensate for defeating a demon. But a few days later, the magician came up to Wynn with additional money, wearing an apologetic face.

“Sorry about this, but this is hush money. They want you to pretend like this incident never happened.” It would be a scandal of epic proportions if word spread that the Empire had made light of the information from the Adventurer’s Guild and almost ruined the country by allowing a demon, and a high-leveled one at that, to roam freely. The magician and the sole-surviving knight would soon be sent to the front lines to silence them. To the top brass, there was no place in the Capital for such inconvenient existences. “I think I’ll be sent to the front lines soon. Before that, I tried my best to get you reward money, but I was only able to get you this much. I’m really sorry.”

Oort and the magician had agreed to keep the fact that Wynn and Leti were the ones to defeat the demon a secret from the Knight Order. Leti’s power, in particular, needed to be kept a secret. It was something so abnormal that one would have to see it to believe it. Fearing that such young children would be easily manipulated, it was a unanimous decision. The more they heard about the magician’s superiors, the deeper the adventurers’ convictions became. They would not even think to bring harm upon the children who had saved them. After investigating the incident and everyone involved, the magician even went as far as warning the adventurers not to get too involved with Leti. As a result, only Lilia and the Guild Master knew the truth. With Oort’s positive assessment

of their performance during the “goblin extermination”, Wynn and Leti were officially approved to become full-fledged adventurers.

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“That adventurer named Oort seems quite sharp. What happened to that magician?”

“I apologize, I do not know...” As Wynn had been only a child back then, he didn’t know the magician’s name.

“I guess I should look into this incident. It intrigues me,” said Alfred as Royce nodded in agreement.

“And what about the Avian girl?”

“Laura ended up adopting her. I think they should still be living together.”

“Your Highness. I believe it would be best not to try recruiting the Avian. If you try to force her, we’ll risk starting a war with the Avians.”

“A war with the Avians would certainly be undesirable. Even I would not intrude upon the peaceful lives of my subjects. She may be an Avian, but she still lives in this country, and is therefore my subject,” stated Alfred. *Moreover, the Avian girl is acquainted with the Brave. If I force it, the Brave may turn against me. That’s too dangerous a bridge to cross.*

“Let us put the matter of the Avians aside and return to the previous topic. You were thinking of having Wynn serve as my sister’s guardian knight, but why? Do you believe him worthy of serving Princess Cornelia?”

Wynn alternated his gaze between Prince Alfred in front of him and Captain Elstead behind him, his body still glowing from Tiara’s strengthening magic.

“Princess Cornelia is a skilled enhancement magic user. She’s perfect for someone like Wynn, who barely has any mana.”

In a flash, Wynn understood why Royce had asked if he could become Princess Cornelia’s guardian knight. He had doubted his ears when he first heard of it. He was surrounded by persons of high status, which put him on edge. Rather, it wasn’t just their status that put him on edge. He felt at ease with Cornelia and Leticia, after all. However, the prince and the elven princess were not people he would normally have had the chance to meet.

Alfred’s next words erased any possibility that Wynn had misheard. “In

addition to enhancement magic, I do believe that their romantic compatibility is quite high.”

“Huh?!”

“Your Highness!”

“Dear brother!” Alfred’s outrageous statement startled an objection from Cornelia. The princess glanced at Wynn, then immediately stared at the floor, blushing furiously.

“Haha, I’m only joking.”

“Your Highness, I ask that you please refrain from teasing my subordinate.” Royce, who was standing to the side behind Alfred, sighed before giving Alfred a sidelong glare.

“He’s been acting so stiffly, I just had to ease the tension a bit,” Alfred laughed lightly.

“Don’t stir things up like that,” Royce muttered, agitated by the prince’s attitude.

“No normal person meeting royalty for the first time would feel at ease.” “My apologies, Count Elstead. Well, back on topic. Wynn. I would like you to become my sister’s guardian knight.”

“What does a guardian knight do?” asked Wynn, “How is it different from being a regular knight?”

“Put simply, you would escort the princess. Think of it as the princess’s elite guards. They would normally be hand-picked from the knights of the Imperial Guard.”

“Elite guards...” Wynn looked at Cornelia for a moment. She was a princess, yet she still allowed him to call himself her friend. Cornelia looked back at him silently. “Why was I chosen?”

“First, Cornelia trusts you. But the bigger reason is that you are the Master of the Brave.”

“Wynn.” Tiara’s azure eyes looked directly at Wynn. “We Elves are very interested in the person known as the Master of the Brave, the one named Wynn Bard. Other countries and races are no less curious.”

“It is as the Great Sage said,” agreed Alfred, placing both hands on the table.

“You have a large influence over the Brave. Frankly, it would be a huge problem for me if you remained in the Knight Order.”

“But... I’m just...” Wynn fumbled for words as he looked down.

“Wynn Bard,” Royce called out to the youth. “In the eyes of the Empire, you are just a commoner who became a knight cadet. Most think that your title as the Master of the Brave was just something you received by being her childhood friend. However, outside the Empire, that title holds great weight. You are the only person to whom the Hero will kneel and bow. That is not to be taken lightly.”

“What you think of yourself is one thing, but what Leticia thinks of you is another. If you wished it, Leticia would wield her power for you. Essentially, you wield the Brave’s power.”

“I agree with Royce,” said Alfred, nodding. “You control a power that could shake the very foundations of this world. I am loath to leave that power under the Knight Order’s hands. For better or worse, the Knight Order operates under a strict hierarchy. It is difficult to refuse an order from someone higher in the chain of command. I wish it weren’t true, but it would be utter foolishness to believe that everyone in the Knight Order is chivalrous and trustworthy. As Cornelia’s guardian knight, you will not be under such control.”

“Are you ordering me to become her guardian knight?”

“No, this is not an order,” said Alfred with a bitter smile, “I said so at the beginning. Right here, right now, you are not acting as Knight Cadet Wynn — Ah, though if you accept, I would have to add a ‘former’ to that — but as the Master of the Brave, Wynn Bard. I will respect your decision, whatever your choice.”

Royce looked at Prince Alfred disapprovingly. *Such empty words. A commoner cannot possibly refuse a royal.*

“Cornelia is not yet eighteen. Therefore, there are only a limited number of official engagements that require her to fulfill her role as a royal. However, this does not mean that she has no obligatory functions to attend as a royal. You will be responsible for her safety during those events. As her guardian knight, only Cornelia may give you orders. It would also help her when interacting with foreign dignitaries if the Master of the Brave were to be by her side.”

“We Elves shall act as a neutral observer to prevent the Empire from exploiting you and your title.”

“As a user of enhancement magic, she has great compatibility with you. While I would like to establish an official group, there are many preparations I have yet to make. In the meantime, it will be you alone.”

*Cornelia's guardian knight...* Under normal circumstances, it would be a great honor to be offered such a post. The knights who guarded the Imperial Princess of Lemmroussell could only come from the cream of the crop, hand-picked from the Imperial Guard. As someone who dreamed of becoming a knight, it would be a dream come true. Well, the princess was his friend, though. But what bothered Wynn was that he was there because he was the “Master of the Brave”, and not because of any personal merit. He would only be gaining the position because he had been lucky enough to know Leticia in the past. That would be a slap in the face for the other knights who had poured their blood, sweat, and tears into slowly rising up the ranks.

Was he really fine with that? Would that really be a dream come true?

“Wynn.” Seeing Wynn’s hesitation, Cornelia finally opened her mouth to speak. “Previously, you told me how you dreamt of becoming a knight. You told me how knights were stronger, wiser, and more determined than anyone else. Their swords fight to bring justice for the weak, and their shields are the last defense of their lords.”

Cornelia looked as she did the first time they had met at the Knight Academy. Unable to find a partner, she had looked lonely and helpless. Cornelia asked him imploringly, “Do you consider me to be an unworthy liege to serve and protect?”